

**Transition Planning and Continuing Education
for Students with Intellectual Disabilities**

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Dedications

I would, above all, like to dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Donna. She has been the source of my strength and perseverance since before I can remember. While growing up, she instilled in me a sense of pride in hard work, acceptance that not all things can be in my control, and determination when things inevitably go wrong. Because of these lessons, I knew I could and would make it through this process. It was a long journey with many ups and downs along the way. There were times when it seemed the downs would never end. She was by my side every step of the way in so many different capacities; as my editor, my shoulder on which to cry, and my voice of reason when I wanted to throw in the towel. I would like to sincerely thank her for her help, her time, her support, and most importantly her belief in me. I love you so much and it is because of you that I made it to this point in my life!

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Abstract

Transition Planning and Continuing Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Sarah Elizabeth Roller

Chairperson: Lori Severino, Ed.D.

The purpose of this study was to research the perspectives, perceptions, and knowledge base that teachers and support personnel had regarding how well the transition planning process prepared high school students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) for life after secondary education and their views on continuing education for these students. Despite the development of programs specifically for students with ID, there still exists a lack of knowledge and resources available to school districts and families that are looking to send these students to a continuing education program at the conclusion of the student's high school career. In addition, the literature review shows that current transition activities and procedures often leave students unprepared for life after high school. This mixed methods study sought to gain information on educator perspectives on the special education transition planning process that students with disabilities experience during their high school education and their perceptions of continuing education for students with ID. Data was collected through an online survey tool and through focus groups. One population was included in this study, which included the special education teachers and support personnel of high school students with ID from six local school districts within South Central Pennsylvania. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data first, followed by a comparison of means and ANOVA tests. Further, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine reliability and validity of the survey tool. The

qualitative data was analyzed with thematic coding and was used to support the quantitative data. The statistical results attained in this study did not result in any substantial significance. However, the qualitative data collected allowed for deeper insight into why the educators responded how they did on the survey and provided more robust answers for research questions (1) and (2). As the data were reviewed, it proved that the awareness of the programs and the understanding of the transition planning process have yet to become common knowledge among all of the participants. This issue led to the development of six recommendations for future practice within school districts to help educators disseminate information and to help students and their families receive information on the secondary transition process and post-secondary options available.

Keywords: special education, transition planning, high school, continuing education, educators, students, parents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 opened doors for many students with disabilities to attend some form of higher education at the conclusion of the student's high school career (Madaus, Kowitt, & Lalor, 2012). In the eight years since, many colleges and universities across the country have developed programs and classes specifically for students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). These programs are designed to offer students with disabilities training and enrichment in either a social skills and independent living focused program, or a career development and vocational focused program (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). While more of these programs are developed every year, the awareness of them has yet to become common knowledge within the secondary educational setting where transition planning for students with disabilities takes place.

According to Benito (2012), many family members feel that their child's high school program did not prepare them for life after high school, nor did their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) contain clearly defined transition plans for what the student would do after high school. Parents and family members often feel overwhelmed and confused by the transition process and the post-secondary options available for their children after graduation (Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). Educators often share a similar sense of unease and worry regarding what these students will be able to do after high school, not just because of the students' skill sets, but because of the lack of options and knowledge of those options available to themselves and the families (Benito, 2012).

Faced with limited resources, advocates, and knowledge; families struggle with the decisions that must be made regarding their children with disabilities. They begin to question what their children will do after high school and how they can prepare for that period of life. While these questions can be stressful enough for parents of regular education students, it can be daunting for parents of children with special needs. This culminating fear essentially morphs into a need to know if continuing education is possible for individuals with disabilities and how they can acquire more information to prepare for it.

There exists a predetermined bias that students with special needs cannot participate in higher education programs (Grigal & Hart, 2010). While not entirely false, schools across the country are beginning to develop programs designed specifically for students with ID (Grigal & Dwyre, 2010). According to Grigal and Hart (2010), many individuals debate the purpose of sending students with ID to college, wondering what they could possibly get out of higher education coursework when many of them have not received a traditional, credits based high school diploma. While not the same for every student, the all-encompassing answer is life exploration (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Thanks to educational grants that derived from the reauthorization of HEOA, programs like SHEP (Supported Higher Education Project) in Kentucky were able to be developed to help students with ID secure a spot within a post-secondary education (PSE) program to develop their skills, explore their interests, and increase their ability to secure a well suited job (Sheppard-Jones, Reilly, & Jones, 2013).

In order to bring attention to this area of research, this study included online surveys and focus groups for the teachers and support personnel of high school students

with ID to obtain an understanding of the perceptions and opinions regarding the transition planning process and continuing education. The data collected throughout this research had the potential to aid the school districts in disseminating information on the secondary transition process and post-secondary options available to the students, their families, and educators.

Within this chapter, the problem, which drove this research, will be introduced along with the purpose of and significance that researching this problem hoped to illuminate. Two research questions were developed for this study to address the problem and to collect data using the mixed methods approach. The theoretical framework, including the researcher's stance, mental models, and an illustrated conceptualized framework of the research will be presented. All language related to the research topic will be defined in order to offer a deeper understanding of the study. Finally, the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that affected this research will be noted to draw attention to the potential biases and setbacks this research incurred.

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was that school district personnel are not adequately preparing students with ID for effective transitions to continuing education programs, due to an ineffective and disconnected transition planning process. The process does not provide school district personnel with adequate knowledge and information about how to meet transitional and educational needs of students with ID. In result, often students with ID are discouraged from exploring continuing education due to a lack of knowledge regarding the programs available (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). This research set out to study the perspectives of selected educational personnel to determine why this problem

existed and whether the teachers and support personnel believed they had adequate knowledge and information concerning the transition planning process and continuing education for students with ID.

The IEP team is comprised of both educators and family members (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). Their objective is to assess the student's abilities and formulate a plan that will benefit the student in school and prepare him for a successful life after graduation. According to Grigal and Neubert (2004), education and vocation activities were the most highly regarded element of transition planning to parents of students with disabilities. This differs somewhat to past research that indicated residential and social skills were more important (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). This shift in thinking among family members, along with the reauthorization of HEOA, has resulted in a higher demand for continuing education programs to be developed for students with ID to participate in after high school. Unfortunately, there exists a lack of knowledge regarding these programs and the transition process in general for families and the school districts. This has contributed to an atmosphere of frustration for parents who want to see their children have rewarding and productive lives after high school (Martinez, et al., 2012).

In research conducted by Benito (2012), participants indicated a sense of unease and worry regarding what students with disabilities would be able to do after high school, not just because of the students' skill sets, but because of the lack of options and knowledge of those options available to educators and families. It was important to identify and gather information on the current knowledge base from the perspectives of both the teachers and the support personnel to resolve the problem of limited knowledge

and information regarding continuing education programs for students with ID and the transition planning process. The survey and focus group data used in this study helped to determine what these individuals knew about transition planning and continuing education for students with ID and what areas they wanted to learn more about. Once educator perceptions on transition planning and continuing education were isolated; resources and information could be disseminated to the researcher's local area to aid IEP teams in appropriate transition planning, which includes the consideration of continuing education for students with disabilities.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

Purpose

It was the purpose of this mixed methods study to research the perspectives and knowledge base of teachers and support personnel (administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators) on the high school transition process and procedures, and their perceptions and knowledge base on continuing education for students with ID. This area of study has had a great amount of attention focused on it in the United States within the last decade due to the reauthorization of HEOA. Several initiatives benefiting students with disabilities were included in the final legislation including access to funds, grants, and materials. In addition, it offered a definition for ID that made it possible for these students to be eligible for the legislation outlined in HEOA and for many institutions of higher education to become eligible for grants to develop programs specifically for this sect of students (Madaus et al., 2012).

While there are many higher education programs and resources available to students with disabilities, school district educators are often in a state of unknowing when it comes to accessing this information and preparing their students for post-secondary life. Teachers do not always feel that the material and education they provide to their students with disabilities prepare them for life after high school (Benito, 2012). In addition, the majority of educators do not feel that the students, families, and even they themselves are aware of the educational opportunities available after completing high school (Benito, 2012; Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). According to Eckes and Ochoa (2005), school districts need to work with institutions of higher education to learn about the programs, legal concerns, and qualifications needed by students to attend. Once this information is gathered it should be shared with the families via transition specialists at IEP meetings or by offering informative training sessions and workshops with guest speakers from the colleges (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). By keeping the parent population informed of the changes to post-secondary options, the school districts can benefit by creating a knowledgeable and active parent population that will in turn aid the students in their future endeavors (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

While parents want what is best for their children, they are often left confused and conflicted with how to handle their children's seemingly unrealistic goals and dreams. For students with disabilities, their parents are faced with the unpleasant task of telling their child that college is not an option (Briel, 2014). However, with further research, parents and educators can find there are continuing education programs designed specifically for students with significant disabilities. While most of these programs are designed for students who have successfully graduated high school, there are some that

offer dual enrollment, in which students remain enrolled in high school for ages 18-21 and participate in college courses (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). Steps towards enrolling the student within a higher education program can be achieved by developing a transition plan that acknowledges the student's limitations and puts strategies in place to help him overcome these obstacles and be successful in his post-secondary education endeavors (Briel, 2014).

The driving purpose of this research was to bring awareness of and information on secondary transition planning and continuing education for students with ID to teachers and support personnel. By obtaining perceptions of these two educator groups, the knowledge and resources derived from this research can allow IEP teams to make informed decisions on life after high school for their students with disabilities.

Significance

This study was significant to the areas of special education and higher education because it offered new data on the perceptions and perspectives of teachers and support personnel who worked directly with students with disabilities. This body of work had the potential to increase awareness of continuing education programs, while simultaneously gathering data on the perceived capabilities of high school students with ID from the perspectives of their teachers and support personnel. This data can help higher education institutions develop programs that will more adequately meet the needs of graduating students with disabilities. In addition, it can act as a resource for educators to inform families of the transition planning components and the possibility of continuing education for students with disabilities.

While post-secondary education for students with ID is an up and coming trend in special education, much work still remains to create quality transition plans that will meet the needs of a wide range of individuals with disabilities. Gaps in the research still remain within the fields of:

- Post-Secondary Educational (PSE) program outcomes
- Parent and educator opinions of PSE programs
- Parent and educator opinions of the secondary transition process
- Benefits of student inclusion
- Recent National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) data

These areas require further research to identify what makes a quality transition plan and how students can be integrated into post-secondary life successfully (Benito, 2012; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011a; Johnson Vitali De Bonda, 2012; Plotner & Marshall, 2015; O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner, & O'Brien, 2012; Wilson, H., Bialk, Freeze, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012).

As a result of participating in and completing a continuing education program, students with disabilities have the potential to improve their academic and social skills, complete a resume with work experiences, hone a specific skill set that will prepare them for a career, and gain the confidence they need to become participating members in society (Briel, 2014). According to the research, these experiences can also help the student gain a deepened knowledge of the world, expand their vocabulary, develop new relationships, strengthen self-determination, self-esteem and self-awareness, and enable new employment opportunities due to improved job-related skills (Wilson et al., 2012). While higher education is not always a logical or correct choice for every student with a

disability, by collecting data on the perceptions of educators on the topic, this research provided these individuals with the information they needed to make informed decisions and future specific transition plans that could benefit the student significantly (Johnson Vitali De Bonda, 2012).

Research Questions

To evaluate the expectations of post-secondary life, the perceptions of continuing education, and the effectiveness of the secondary special education transition planning process for students with Intellectual Disabilities, a mixed methods study was conducted utilizing surveys and focus groups. Two questions drove this research:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Conceptual Framework

Post-positivism is an epistemological position that holds that the goal of knowledge is simply to accept that the biases of the researcher can influence what is observed, and keep these biases in check by acknowledging them (Creswell, 2013). This researcher understood that biases would be present in everyone's research; the solution then was to acknowledge their existence and put measures in place to control their influence on the research.

Having spent the last eight years as a special education teacher, this researcher had developed personal opinions and biases that could have potentially impacted the research. Acknowledging that they existed and developing a plan of action to control their influence embodied the post-positivist approach (Creswell, 2013). Throughout this process, this researcher explored personal mental models about the research, problems that were encountered, and how biases influenced the research (Creswell, 2012).

All students have a right to education. This statement does not merely begin and end with the typical allowances of race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. This statement also includes an individual's level of intellectual functioning. A desired outcome of this research was to bring awareness of continuing education programs for students with special needs and the benefits of a well-developed transition plan. By researching and collecting data within this field of study, these boundaries can be broken and the full acceptance and inclusion of students with disabilities into society can one day be achieved.

The available literature for this research topic will be examined and reviewed in a study-by-study format within chapter two of this dissertation.

The conceptual framework of this study revolved around teacher and support personnel perspectives on continuing education for students with Intellectual Disabilities and the current procedures of the secondary transition plan process. This framework aligned with disability theory research. According to Creswell (2013), disability theory "addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities" (p. 33). Examining the foundation of this research problem, post-secondary planning and education for students with ID, and

the participants to be used, teachers and support personnel; this study very clearly fit with the nature of disability theory. By recognizing the existence of personal biases related to this study, the researcher embraced and utilized the post-positivism epistemological philosophical stance (Creswell, 2013).

Figure 1 shows a map of the conceptual framework, which guided this study. Three key themes were identified and included in the framework. These themes are linked by Post-Secondary Education Knowledge Barriers feeding into the two remaining themes of Transition Plan Issues and IEP Team Support.

Concerning theme one, Post-Secondary Education Knowledge Barriers; the research showed that information and resources are not adequately shared among educators (Benito, 2012; Griffin, McMillian, & Hodapp, 2010; Grigal & Neubert, 2004). This lack of communication leads to problems disseminating information to students and families.

Concerning theme two, Transition Plan Issues; a lack of resources and information can result in inappropriate transition goals and missed opportunities for the student to pursue after completing high school. Further, the research showed that often students fail to step up and take a leadership role in planning for their future (Carter et al., 2013; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Thoma et al., 2012). These factors lead to an ineffective transition plan and set the student up for failure in their post-secondary lives.

Finally, concerning theme three, IEP Team Support; a failure to share information with all members of the IEP team can create an air of animosity and can pit parents against educators (Hetherington et al., 2010; Martinez, et al., 2012; Snyder, 2014). By keeping the lines of communication open between the school and the home, a rapport can

be established between the two and a fully functioning IEP team, which includes the student, can work together to develop a transition plan that meets the student's needs.

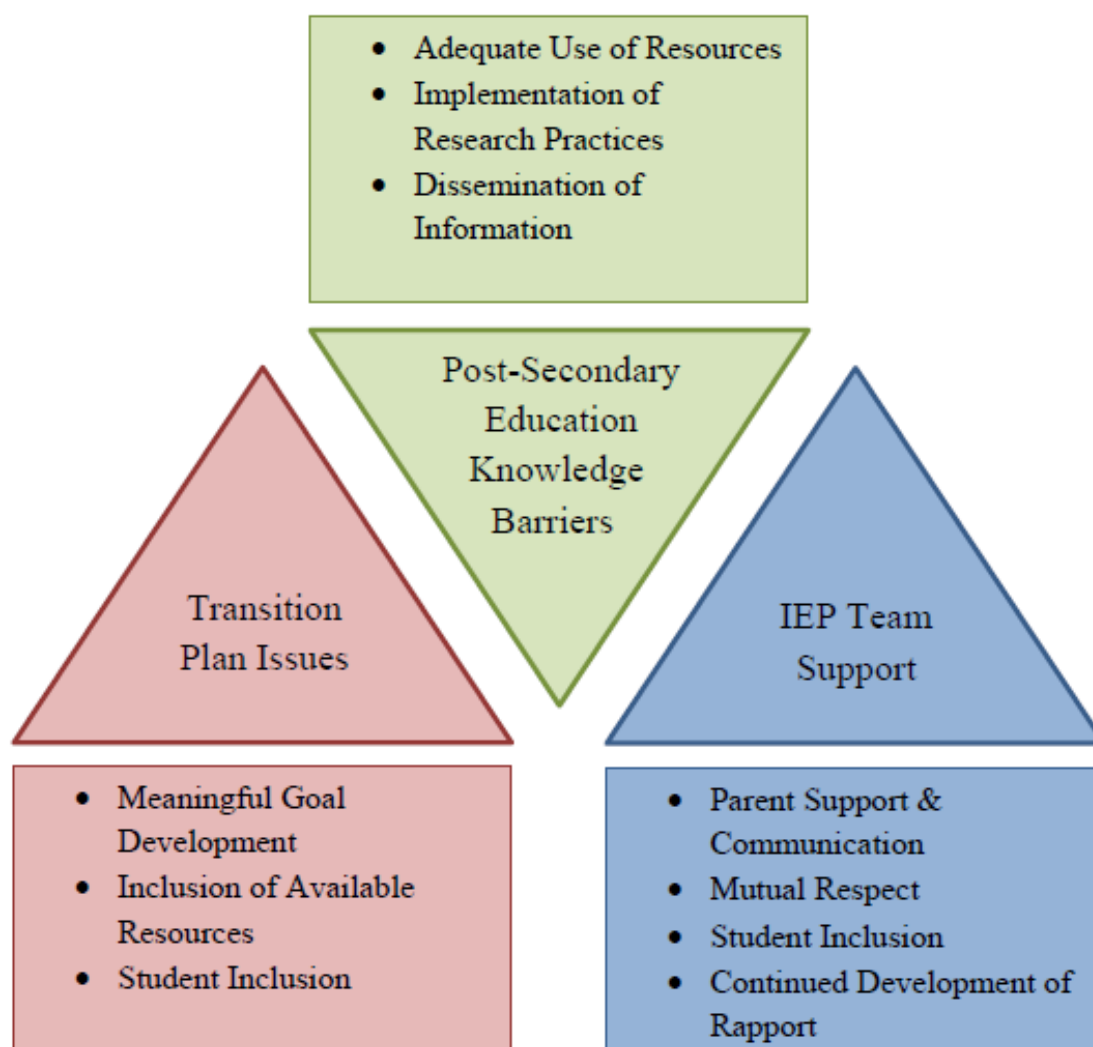


Figure 1. Concept map. This figure illustrates the researcher's conceptual framework.

Definition of Terms

Continuing Education. Also referred to as *Post-Secondary Education* or *Higher Education*, any type of education or training that takes place after graduation from a

secondary education institution (Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network [PaTTAN], n.d.).

Higher Education. Also referred to as *Post-Secondary Education* or *Continuing Education*, any type of education or training that takes place after graduation from a secondary education institution (PaTTAN, n.d.).

Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA). A 2008 reauthorization of the original 1965 Higher Education Act (HEA), which includes several initiatives benefiting students with disabilities (Madaus, Kowitt, & Lalor, 2012).

Inclusion. Providing to a student with a disability appropriate supports and services so that he may be educated with non-disabled peers in a regular educational setting (Pennsylvania Code, 2008).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). A document which outlines the strengths and needs, goals, and special supports and services for students with disabilities in primary and secondary education facilities (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Intellectual Disability (ID). Previously referred to as Mental Retardation, ID is a diagnosis assigned to individuals with IQ scores that fall below 70 and who are lacking in the adaptive skill areas of social and practical functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The educational setting for a student with disabilities. Under state law, the student must be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. A student cannot be removed from the regular education setting merely due to the identification of a disability. Schools must provide a full continuum of placement options regardless of expense (Pennsylvania Code, 2008).

National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students examined how students with disabilities fared in and out of school (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996).

Post-Secondary Education (PSE). Also referred to as *Higher Education* or *Continuing Education*, any type of education or training that takes place after graduation from a secondary education institution (PaTTAN, n.d.).

Special Education. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is provided to children with disabilities to enable them to participate in the community, including preparation for employment or higher education (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Special Needs. Supports and services provided to children with disabilities to enable them to participate and receive FAPE (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2008).

Transition. A process for students with disabilities to prepare them for adult life. In Pennsylvania this begins at 14 years of age when a plan that includes employment, post-secondary education, and independent living goals is developed to meet the needs of the student as he or she moves from a secondary education placement to inclusion within society (PaTTAN, n.d.).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Many individuals assume that students with special needs cannot attend some form of higher education (Briel, 2014). With the reauthorization of HEOA, this assumption has become a thought of the past. More and more students with disabilities are discovering and enrolling in college programs which will provide them with increased life skills and even a college certificate (Briel, 2014; Wilson, et al., 2012).

An assumption was generated that post-secondary education programs for students with disabilities do not exist because of a lack of information made available to school districts. While this assumption is incorrect, it does create ramifications on the programs' notoriety and levels of enrollment. School districts need to receive information on the local programs available in order to prepare proper transition plans for their students (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

Despite the creation of post-secondary education programs for individuals with disabilities, an assumption was made that a lack of self-motivation exists within the students themselves (Wilson et al., 2012). Many parent advocates assume the role of motivational coach for their child and tend to steer their course through life based on the goals and dreams they foster for their child, rather than the student's personal preferences. This course of action can lead to disappointment for both the student and the family (Johnson Vitali De Bonda, 2012).

While the number of higher education programs is increasing, the awareness of them is something that has remained limited. Higher education programs for students with ID are not advertised or encouraged within the secondary education field (Briel, 2014). The discovery of these programs is left up to those parents who zealously advocate for their children during the transition planning process (Wilson et al., 2012). This lack of awareness limits the number of students who will go on to participate in post-secondary education and imposes a type of glass ceiling on this population of students, preventing them from reaching their full potential.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the size of the population. A pool of 80 participants was used in this study. While other studies of a similar nature had far more participants from which to collect data, these studies were conducted using a statewide population pool and thus had more participants to utilize. This limitation did not have a negative impact on the findings or conclusions of this study, as the purpose was to conduct an action research type study, which would develop results and recommendations, which would be directly pertinent to the researcher's local area.

Another limitation of this study was a misunderstanding of what continuing education is for students with disabilities. While the literature suggests that higher education programs for students with ID are designed to offer training and enrichment in either a social skills and independent living focus, or a career development and vocational focus; many individuals who have not researched these programs think the students are only being included into regular college courses not tailored to meet their needs (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). This limitation did not prevent the researcher from conducting a study that validly answered the research question and solved the research problem appropriately and relevantly.

Delimitations

This study took place with a small population of special education teachers and support personnel of high school students with ID. The study was limited to six school districts within the South Central Pennsylvania region and thus the results may not be applicable to all schools across the country. This study did not include educators of students with disabilities other than ID; however, due to similarities in special education

services provided, literature concerning other disabilities was explored. In addition, the perspectives of graduated students with ID and parents of students with ID, were not measured in this study. While the literature review explored the viewpoints of educators, parents, and students; the purpose of this research was to ascertain the perceptions of the educational staff. This limitation allowed recommendations to be developed specifically for the school districts to implement in order to strengthen the transition planning process and develop the knowledge base of continuing education.

Another delimitation of this study was the exclusion of the transition planning component of independent living. While post-secondary living arrangements are an important element of developing a thorough and complete transition plan, the goal of this study was to examine continuing education. This included how much teachers and support personnel were aware of continuing education programs and what they knew about transition planning for students with disabilities who want to pursue continuing education.

Summary

Due to new studies, research, and the reauthorization of the HEOA, post-secondary education has now become a viable option for students with disabilities. Further contributions to this field of study can be made with additional research into the perspectives of educators, families, or higher education personnel regarding continuing education and transition practices. This mixed methods study intended to collect data from educators within a setting of six different school districts located in the area of South Central Pennsylvania, in order to gain a much needed insight into the perceived process of secondary transition planning and how higher education opportunities are

explored within the high school years of students' with disabilities educational careers.

In addition, the themes of IEP team support and transition planning issues were explored as part of this mixed methods study. A desired outcome of this study was to contribute to the growing body of knowledge of continuing education and the transition planning process for students with disabilities. With newly gained information educators may be better equipped to develop transition plans that will meet the needs of their students and consider options that were previously unknown or out of reach.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Two questions parents often ask are: “What will my child do after high school?” and “Is continuing education possible for students with disabilities?” While in the past the answer to the second question has traditionally been “no,” the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) has inspired many higher education institutions across the country to develop programs specifically for students with disabilities, in particular Intellectual Disabilities (ID) (Madaus, Kowitt, & Lalor, 2012; VanBergeijk & Cavanagh, 2012). Since 2008, when HEOA was reauthorized, colleges and universities have been creating programs to bring in a more diverse group of undergraduates. The curriculum ranges from simple course auditing to certificate and degree programs.

The purpose of this review was to examine the current literature available regarding the transition planning process and students with disabilities transitioning to post-secondary education (PSE) programs. A literature search using Boolean phrases such as “students with disabilities AND higher education,” “transition AND college,” “students AND intellectual disabilities AND higher education,” “transition AND teachers,” “transition AND disabilities AND families,” was conducted using academic literature search engines. The searches yielded a number of peer reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations that focused on the transition process and students with disabilities attending post-secondary educational programs. While reviewing the available literature, three themes were identified: (1) transition planning; (2) post-secondary education; and (3) employment.

Literature Map

While researching the available literature surrounding this topic, three thematic strands were identified to organize the research. They included:

- Transition Planning
- Post-Secondary Education
- Employment

Transition planning explored the process that parents, students, and educators go through while preparing students with disabilities for life after secondary education, as well as their expectations for these students and their perceptions on PSE. This strand connected with post-secondary education and employment; as it served as the basis for how students prepare themselves, and how parents and educators prepare these students for life after high school. The Higher Education Opportunity Act was developed in 2008 as a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and made PSE a viable option for students with disabilities. The post-secondary education strand also examined PSE development guidelines and awareness, the Think College Standards, the types of students with disabilities attending PSE, the types of programs available to students with disabilities, and the notable concerns parents have. This strand connected with employment. The employment strand examined how students are received and fare in the workforce and how attending PSE can improve their employment opportunities. This strand was a derivative of post-secondary education and transition planning.

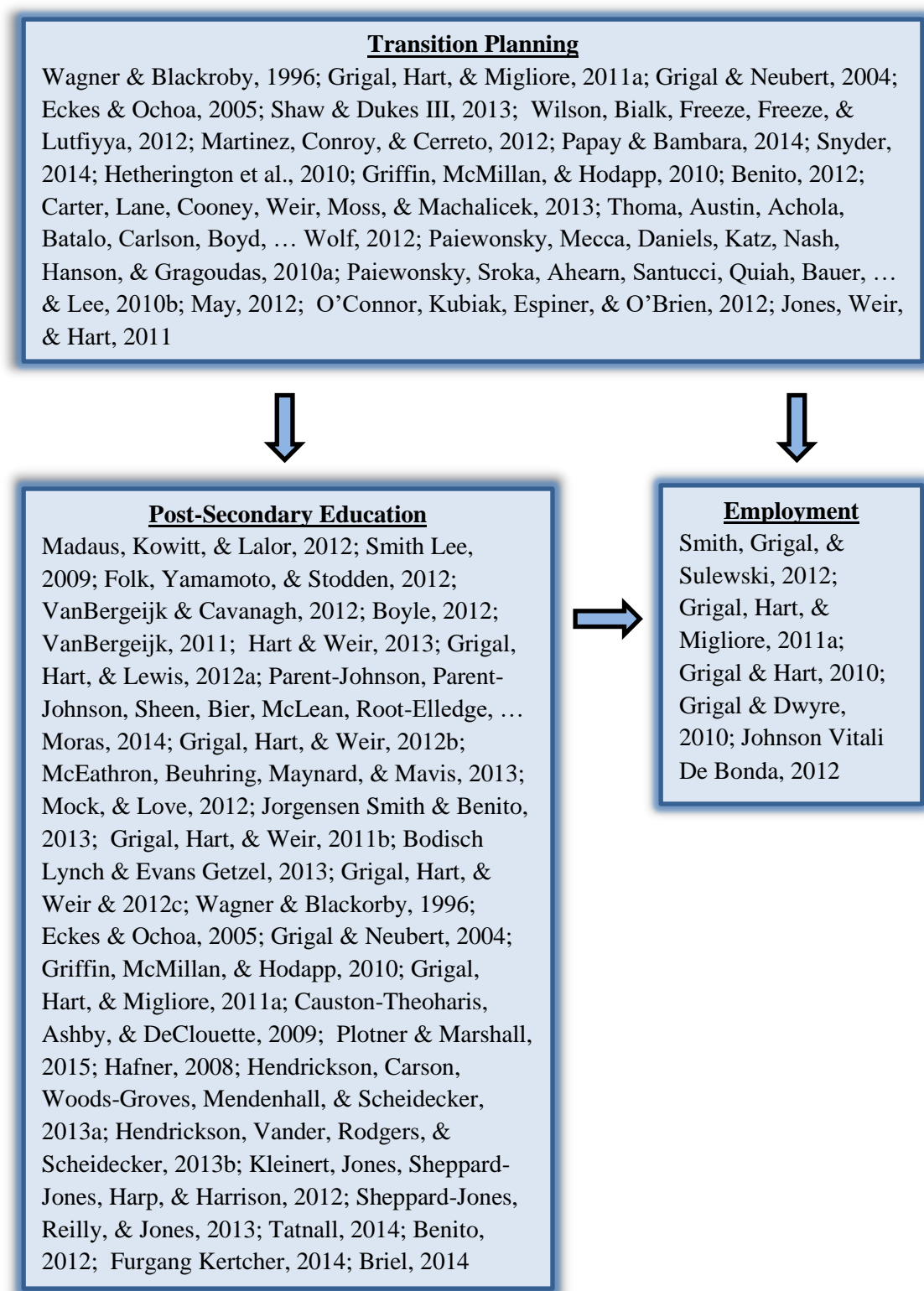


Figure 2. Literature map. This figure illustrates the literature framework.

Review of Literature

Transition Planning

Job preparation and continuing education are two areas that secondary transition plans address. The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS) examined how students with disabilities fared in and out of school. The NLTS collected data in 1987 and again in 1990 on a group of over 8,000 students with disabilities nationwide (Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). While this data is dated, it provides relevant material that has helped define much of what is known about students with disabilities in secondary school placements and their placements after leaving or graduating from secondary educational institutions.

Nearly twenty years after the first waves of NLTS data were collected, a second round of data collection occurred to assess any changes in the special education population of students in secondary education. According to Grigal, Hart, and Migliore (2011a), data from the National Longitudinal Transition Survey 2 (NLTS2) was analyzed to draw comparisons between students with ID and students with other disabilities, and how they fared in regards to transition planning, assistance from outside agencies, and post-secondary education and employment. Noticeable differences in transition related goals were identified between students with ID and students with other types of disabilities (Grigal et al., 2011a). Most relevant, students with ID were less likely to have transition goals related to continuing education or competitive employment; rather, their goals pertained to sheltered or supported employment (Grigal et al., 2011a). This data can help secondary schools realize that more diverse transition goals should be developed to meet the students' needs and not to simply continue with the status quo.

A need exists to better understand the transition process for parents, students, and educators. Training is a necessary path for families and educators to take in order to become knowledgeable in the continually developing adult service systems (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). Once the differences between secondary and post-secondary education are understood, IEP teams can develop transition plans that will better prepare students for post-secondary life (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

According to Eckes and Ochoa (2005), differences between secondary and post-secondary laws need to be examined to help define the issues surrounding educational transition. Second, responsibilities pertaining to post-secondary transition for both students and educators must be explored (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Third, problems that arise in the higher education institutions need to be analyzed to understand the difficulties in interpreting the law (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Finally, recommendations must be derived to help secondary and post-secondary institutions work together (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Some states already have college disability service personnel and high school special educators working together in order to develop effective transition guidelines (Shaw & Dukes III, 2013). Once both sides of the transition process are better examined and understood, more practical and achievable plans can be developed to help students with disabilities succeed (Shaw & Dukes III, 2013). Additional data needs to be analyzed to help both secondary and post-secondary educational facilities benefit from the process of transition planning.

Parents

When choosing a path to take after secondary education, many people play an important role. However, none may be more important than the role of the parent

advocate. Often time, doctors and educators recommend settings that are contained and separate from the regular population of children (Wilson, Bialk, Freeze, Freeze, & Lutfiyya, 2012). Without the necessary guidance and information, parents feel “pushed” into these recommendations, while having little or no say (Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). When parents acquire the necessary information and take on the role of advocate they can accomplish great things for their child including attending traditional schools, spending time in regular classes, and participating in extracurricular activities (Wilson et al., 2012). More research is needed to fully understand the responsibilities a parent takes on when they assume the role of advocate for their child.

According to Martinez et al. (2012), a study was conducted to examine the relationship between parent involvement, access of information regarding transition, and desire for post-secondary education. This study was conducted in 2007 in the Northern Virginia area and utilized a census survey (Martinez et al., 2012). Results indicated that the level of student inclusion was closely related to the level of parent involvement and to the parents’ desire for the child to participate in PSE (Martinez et al., 2012). According to an analysis of the NLTS2 data, parent involvement played an important role in student success as well. The data indicates that students who had parents who were involved in the transition planning process were 41 times more likely to participate in some form of higher education (Papay & Bambara, 2014).

Snyder (2014) found similar results with a qualitative study that examined perspectives of parents of students with ID, multiple disabilities, and autism about the Secondary Transition Process. However, results of this study also showed that parents did not possess a clear knowledge of the transition process, what the role of the parent

should be, and that most of the information they receive comes from sources outside of the school (Hetherington et al., 2010; Snyder, 2014). Parents feel as though higher education would be a logical choice for their children, but they feel as though their children's teachers do not support this decision (Griffin et al., 2010). According to survey data collected on family perspectives on PSE, parents feel they are more open toward continuing education for their children with disabilities and that the educators could do much more to offer information and support for this transition option (Griffin et al., 2010).

According to Martinez et al. (2012), parents were often overwhelmed and confused by the transition process stating desires of "I don't want to think about it" (p. 283-284). They also believed the school districts failed to engage them in the process, and were tired and frustrated after years of negotiating and battling with the school (Hetherington et al., 2010). Many parents viewed the transition process as an exit activity that didn't take place until closer to graduation, but that if they had more information they would be less confused and worried about the process (Hetherington et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2012). Parents indicated that communication, collaboration, and rapport with school staff is an important part of the relationship building process and would help with integrating them more with the transition procedures (Hetherington et al., 2010; Snyder, 2014).

While some parents feel the transition process is put off until the last minute, many indicate that the entire transition planning process in the secondary school setting is lacking (Martinez et al., 2012). In a study conducted by The Florida College Collaborative, professionals who support people with ID and families of youth with ID

were surveyed to collect data on their perspectives of PSE programs and the transition process (Benito, 2012). According to Benito (2012), the majority of family respondents indicated that their child's high school program did not prepare their child for life after high school, nor did their child's IEP contain clearly defined plans for what the student would do after high school. Families indicated that a meaningful college experience for a student with ID would include competitive and customized employment outcomes (Benito, 2012). One parent summed up the thoughts of many: "I don't want my daughter to sit in an adult day training program. I want her to be included in her community with peers without disabilities, to be purposefully employed, and to feel she has a valuable place in society" (Benito, 2012, p. 3).

When asked what they hoped their children or students would receive through PSE, many respondents noted the need for job training and employment preparation, inclusion in college courses and activities to promote socialization and relationships with students without disabilities, and the benefits of peer tutors and mentors (Benito, 2012). In addition, parents feel it is important for their children to become self-aware and to start making critical decisions on their own (Carter et al., 2013).

Students

Papay and Bambara (2014) conducted an analysis of the NLTS2 data to determine best practices in transition planning. According to the authors, student participation in transition planning played a key role in student success after high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014). The data indicates that students who were involved with their own transition planning were three times more likely to participate in some form of higher

education, were five times more likely to be employed, and three times more likely to engage in socialization (Papay & Bambara, 2014).

Self-determination is an important character trait to possess when planning for transition (Carter et al., 2013). According to Carter et al. (2013), parents rank self-determination skills very highly, yet do not necessarily believe their children perform these skills well. “One essential emphasis of preparing students for adulthood should involve equipping them with the skills, attitudes, and opportunities needed to assume more active roles in directing their own lives and charting their future paths” (Carter et al., 2013). The findings in a qualitative study support the need to enhance self-determination skills and enable students to become their own advocates (Thoma et al., 2012). The data indicates that putting measures in place such as counseling services can help foster self-determination skills which can help the student become more independent (Thoma et al., 2012).

Another positive predictor of post-secondary outcomes and a best practice in transition activities is participation in life skills and social skills instruction (Papay & Bambara, 2014). These skills can help prepare students for the higher amount of inclusion and level of independence they will experience when transitioning to a college environment. For students with disabilities this can be a very confusing and difficult world to manage. Students with disabilities often enlist the help of an educational coach to assist with the college experience (Paiewonsky et al., 2010a). One critical obstacle for students with disabilities to overcome in higher education is finding their voice. It is important for these students to learn to speak up for themselves, ask questions, and enlighten individuals on their needs and accommodations (Paiewonsky et al., 2010a).

Taking on this role of self-advocate during PSE transitions can help a student with disabilities make the most of his or her college experience and gain some much needed independence.

Independence is one desired outcome for students who choose to continue their education after high school. In a participatory action research project, nine college students with ID in Massachusetts set out to document their college experience (Paiewonsky et al., 2010b). The students noted that they had independence on campus, were treated like adults, had courses that aligned with interests, were able to socialize in student centers, and were able to utilize the public transportation system (Paiewonsky et al., 2010b). The students also noted that some areas needed improvement such as more opportunities to take classes, having prior knowledge of college language and expectations, coaches who facilitate rather than do, and more meaningful inclusive opportunities to develop friendships (Paiewonsky et al., 2010b).

With HEOA opening doors for students with disabilities to enter college classes, the amount of inclusive opportunities for students with ID is also increasing. Likewise, for students without disabilities, their interactions with individuals with disabilities are on the rise as well. According to May (2012), students who have participated in classes with inclusion showed more openness to diversity at the end of the course. This may indicate that students who participate with individuals with ID more regularly will develop a deeper sense of acceptance and better social relationships with individuals who are different (May, 2012).

Educators

The literature indicates that inclusion not only has a positive effect on students, but according to O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner, and O'Brien (2012), inclusion can have a positive effect on higher education teachers as well. Eleven professors participated in a study of reactions to students with disabilities participating in their courses (O'Connor et al., 2012). According to O'Connor et al. (2012), the results indicate that all staff found the integration of students with ID into their classes to be beneficial in several ways: (1) provided the students an opportunity to be included with non-disabled peers; (2) provided the professors an opportunity to investigate alternative practices that could potentially reach a larger population of students; and (3) the level of participation by the auditing students seemed to encourage the traditional students. In order to promote inclusive practices, additional studies should be conducted to examine the benefits for both students and staff within education. Likewise, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) should be examined within the world of PSE and within the workforce to note the experiences of individuals with and without disabilities.

From a review of the available research, it can be told that there is limited data available on educator perceptions of the secondary transition process and the expectations that educators have for their students with disabilities. One available study did analyze educator perspectives on life after high school for students with ID. According to Benito (2012), the majority of educators noted that their students were educated in segregated special classes. They also stated that the students' educational careers had not adequately prepared them for life after high school, even though the majority of educators noted that these students did have IEPs that included individualized transition plans (Benito, 2012).

An overwhelming 71% of educators expressed concern that the students and their families were not aware of the resources and educational opportunities available to these students after high school (Benito, 2012). When asked what the most important components of PSE programs are, the majority of educators “cited inclusive, individualized PSE opportunities geared toward students’ interests and strengths, with curriculum accommodations and individualized supports” (Benito, 2012, p. 3). Surprisingly, only a few respondents believed that continuing life skills programs would be the most beneficial (Benito, 2012).

Now that programs are being developed specifically for students with disabilities, such as ID, adjustments are being made in the higher education curricula for educating the next wave of special education teachers (Jones, Weir, & Hart, 2011). These students are getting to experience first-hand the benefits of inclusive education practices for students with ID, as well as gaining experience in working directly with students with disabilities (Jones et al., 2011). A need exists within this topic to examine the benefits of inclusion within various settings. When choosing an LRE, it is important to note the anticipated benefits for not only the student, but for the peers and educators as well.

More studies are needed to fully understand the implications of the transition process and how the planning and implementation affect the student’s success. Likewise, parent advocates and their role in their child’s education and the transition process should be examined for connections to student success after secondary education. Grigal and Neubert (2004) found that the more profound the student disability, the lower the parent expectation for academic skills, competitive work, and independent living. While, if the student has a milder disability the parent expectations for an academic focus, independent

living, and a push for a competitive work environment increases (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). Regardless, “there appears to be much room for improvement in several aspects of transition planning including increased student and parent involvement, improved relationships with school personnel, and more clearly articulated transition plans” (Hetherington et al., 2010, p. 169). Once an effective transition planning process is put into place, students with disabilities will be able to take advantage of the groundbreaking legislative changes put into effect by the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

Post-Secondary Education

Current Law and HEOA

According to Madaus et al. (2012), the original Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 provided qualifying students with federally funded financial aid to attend higher education programs. Financial aid, prior to this point, was left to the state governments or private donors. With the enactment of HEOA on August 14, 2008, several initiatives benefiting students with disabilities were included in the final legislation (Madaus et al., 2012; Smith Lee, 2009). Some of these include: access to work-study funds and grants, funds available to higher education institutions that provide high quality education to students with disabilities, improved access to materials for students with vision impairments, defined ID; which in turn made these students eligible to the legislation outlined in HEOA, and expanded the definition of what higher education means, resulting in the addition of many programs (Madaus et al., 2012). While the reauthorization of HEOA opened the doors of PSE to students with disabilities, it also highlighted the lack

of programs available to these individuals and the struggles they face within the field of continuing education.

In order to help increase the amount of PSE programs being created across the country, the U.S. Department of Education created the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) program in 2010 (Folk, Yamamoto, & Stodden, 2012). TPSID was founded in order to improve the transition process to higher education programs for individuals with ID (Folk et al., 2012). According to Folk et al. (2012), TPSID provides grants to create or expand inclusive comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with ID that promote acquisition of self-determination skills.

Although more programs are being created, many barriers prevent students with disabilities from attending some form of higher education, including a lack of support within college programs and limited funds (VanBergeijk & Cavanagh, 2012). Now through the reauthorization of HEOA, students with disabilities can apply for certain grants and funds to attend PSE programs (VanBergeijk & Cavanagh, 2012). Under this new legislation, students with disabilities have access to Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), something only students enrolled in full-time degree programs could apply for prior to 2008 (Boyle, 2012; VanBergeijk, 2011).

According to Boyle (2012), a student must meet four criteria in order to be eligible for financial aid under the new legislation in HEOA. These four criteria are: (1) must have exited high school, (2) must have an Intellectual Disability as defined by HEOA, (3) must complete the FAFSA, and (4) must attend an approved Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) (Boyle, 2012). While students with ID are not eligible for

student loans yet, they are eligible for Pell grants, Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity grants, and Federal Work-Study program funds provided they are enrolled in a U.S. Department of Education approved CTP and maintain satisfactory progress through the program as defined by the school (Boyle, 2012; Smith Lee, 2009; VanBergeijk, 2011). Title IV higher education institutions must offer CTPs, which allow disabled students to participate in classes with students without disabilities (VanBergeijk, 2011).

It is important to note that receiving financial aid does not necessarily cover the entire cost of the higher education program. There are, however, other options that families can consider when locating money to help with higher education expenses for their children with disabilities (Boyle, 2012). Medicaid is one option that can be used to pay for services such as education coaches, mentors, physical or occupational therapy, transportation, etc. that the student may require while attending a PSE program (Hart & Weir, 2013). If the student has been previously set up with a state Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VR), the agency may be able to provide funds for tuition and other expenses (Hart & Weir, 2013). Students taking part in a dual enrollment program, college courses for students 18-21 still enrolled in high school, have use of IDEA funds to pay for tuition (Hart & Weir, 2013). In addition, there may be foundations and councils that have set up grants and waivers students can apply for in various locations across the country (Hart & Weir, 2013). With the increase in available financial aid for students and grants for institutions, and the push for students with disabilities to attend PSE programs, more higher education institutions will be applying for eligibility of their

programs under Title IV (VanBergeijk & Cavanagh, 2012). The creation of PSE programs simply to receive funding is one area of study that should be further examined.

The number of college programs for students with disabilities has undoubtedly increased in the last eight years, the issue remains that the students are not able to find the programs (Grigal, Hart, & Lewis, 2012a). As with the initial passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975, it will take time for the legislature contained within HEOA to become common knowledge and practice (Grigal et al., 2012a). According to Grigal et al. (2012a), there is a need to “create standards to guide best practice, training for professionals, and research to identify evidence-based practices and outcomes” in order for HEOA to be effective (p. 2). Once this happens, more studies can be conducted to examine the quality of these programs and how students are being integrated and included in the newly developed curriculum.

PSE Development Guidelines and Awareness

Inclusive higher education options are gaining momentum across the country thanks to the legislature of HEOA. However, the programs differ drastically by state, “with activities ranging from strategic planning to pilot projects to established programs” (Parent-Johnson et al., 2014, p. 1). According to Parent-Johnson et al., (2014), Think College funded 18 Statewide Strategic Planning grants to promote the continual development of these programs. While much work goes into creating a higher education program, establishing a stakeholder group and including them in the planning process opens doors to resources and information that may be crucial to the successful development of these programs (Parent-Johnson et al., 2014). In developing a strategic plan to create a PSE program for students with disabilities, it is important to incorporate

as much stakeholder input as possible, keep the plan moving toward its goals, and to delegate aspects of the plan to group members so everyone is involved in the process (Parent-Johnson et al., 2014). Many states and independent researchers are beginning to see the benefits of analyzing these programs in order to develop strategic guidelines for successful implementation.

According to Grigal, Hart, and Weir (2012b), survey results were collected from 149 programs within 39 states about their PSE programs for students with ID. Program participants included 4-year colleges, 2-year colleges, and trade and technical schools (Grigal et al., 2012b). Four-year colleges provided the most PSE programs for students with disabilities, accounting for 51% (Grigal et al., 2012b). According to Grigal et al. (2012b), most students who participated within these higher education programs were referred to them by their Local Education Agencies (LEA). The categories of analysis were: program characteristics, recruitment, course/campus access, funding, collaboration, employment, and residential services (Grigal et al., 2012b). The data indicates that the students' experiences differed greatly from one program to another, as well as differing significantly from their non-disabled peers (Grigal et al., 2012b). The literature suggests that this data can serve as a baseline to help programs develop and become more consistent as they evolve (Grigal et al., 2012b). More information is needed within this area of the literature to identify the specific qualities that are beneficial and detrimental to the students' experiences within these programs in order to help develop effective guidelines to follow when developing and implementing a new program.

While many programs are being developed for students with disabilities, a nationally recommended framework or model to use when developing or selecting PSE

programs for students with disabilities has yet to be created. McEathron, Beuhring, Maynard, and Mavis (2013), believe there is a need to explore the world of PSE for students with disabilities and provide sound information for the public regarding these programs. A taxonomy of 21 PSE programs for students with ID was created after interviews were conducted with both staff and directors of the programs, documents and materials were reviewed, and surveys were conducted (McEathron et al., 2013). The programs included in the taxonomy were provided at both two year and four year higher education facilities (McEathron et al., 2013). The goal of the PSE taxonomy was to provide information regarding these programs to interested individuals so they are able to compare and contrast the similarities and differences. This information would aide students and families in making a choice that will best suit their needs, since the programs differ so drastically from one to the next due to the lack of development guidelines (McEathron et al., 2013). The taxonomy tool included four domains by which to assess the programs; organization, admissions, support and pedagogical (McEathron et al., 2013). Within the organizational domain, there were five categories; type of institution, program administration or sponsor, program length, program funding sources, and program goals (McEathron et al., 2013). Admissions contained five categories as well; student status, student academic skills, student functional & behavioral skills, selectivity, and tuition & fees (McEathron et al., 2013). The support domain contained four categories; school or program based support, agency based support, family support, and financial aid (McEathron et al., 2013). Finally, within the pedagogical domain there were four categories; academic components, vocational components, independent living,

and social components (McEathron et al., 2013). While a good representation of programs was reviewed, many exist that have not been examined.

According to Mock and Love (2012), the state of New York also developed a mission to increase the awareness of and need for PSE for students with ID. Four summits were held in which stakeholders discussed the need for more and better inclusive practices within the PSE community (Mock & Love, 2012). Mock and Love (2012), present the model by which New York conducted its summits and brought about changes, so that others might start the process within their own states to help spread awareness of PSE programs for individuals with disabilities. The topics of discussion at the summits included: state wide policies, practices, and beliefs pertaining to PSE programs for students with ID (Mock & Love, 2012). Facilitate statewide planning and increase awareness were the goals kept on target by: guiding questions, expert presenters, and group discussions (Mock & Love, 2012). According to Mock and Love (2012), information gathered from the summits has been used to develop strategies to increase inclusive PSE program development.

Florida is yet another state that has reviewed local programs and has developed a model to provide inclusive PSE options to students with disabilities as a result of the reauthorization of HEOA (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013). A person-centered/individualized support model was found to provide optimal access to PSE for students with ID (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013). “Within this model, the individual student’s vision and career goals drive the services and supports that are provided” within the PSE program (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013, p. 399). One outcome of HEOA was the allocating of grants to higher education institutions that develop programs for students

with ID (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013). Four efforts were used to meet the goal of developing a proposal for the grants available through HEOA (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013). They include: strategic planning to develop goals, statewide surveys to collect views on the positives and negatives surrounding PSE, developing a webpage that will provide up-to-date information about PSE, and a registry of available programs in Florida for students with ID (Jorgensen Smith & Benito, 2013). Jorgensen Smith and Benito (2013) believe that other states will utilize this model to secure their own funding to increase the amount of PSE programs for students with ID. Once this funding is secured, students can begin to better prepare for continuing education through their post-secondary transition goals.

Think College Standards

While few students with disabilities pursue some form of post-secondary education, students with ID comprise the lowest percentages in this group with only 11% going on to attend a two-year or four-year college after completing high school (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011b). According to the literature, there is minimal funding to research and develop PSE programs for students with ID (Grigal et al., 2011b). In order to improve this, more money is needed to fund research and implement model projects (Grigal et al., 2011b). Due to a lack of guidelines, Think College developed a set of standards to use in the planning, development, and assessment of higher education programs (Grigal et al., 2011b). These standards were written and validated by higher education professionals who are experts in the field of programs for students with ID and are now being used to help researchers establish guidelines for acceptable and successful continuing education programs (Grigal et al., 2011b).

According to Bodisch Lynch and Evans Getzel (2013), the Think College (TC) Standards were developed at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

The TC Standards reflect an applied perspective from higher education professionals with content expertise and researchers and practitioners who have significant understanding of programs for students with ID....The goal of the TC Standards is not to support the creation of parallel special education or rehabilitation programs on college campuses— it is to support the creation and study of authentic, inclusive higher education. (Grigal et al., 2011b, p. 4-5)

These standards can be used to assess post-secondary educational programs for students with disabilities (Bodisch Lynch & Evans Getzel, 2013; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012c). Because of the rush to create PSE programs for students with disabilities after the 2008 reauthorization of HEOA, many programs are hastily being developed without a set of academic standards (Bodisch Lynch & Evans Getzel, 2013).

According to Bodisch Lynch and Evans Getzel (2013), following the TC Standards will allow higher education institutions to create quality programming for students with disabilities. While the TC Standards are a start to develop quality programs, a set of nationally mandated standards should be researched and developed to better meet the needs of these students.

Students Attending PSE

According to the first wave of NLTS data, only 4% of students with disabilities went on to attend a four year college, this is very low compared with the 12% who went on to attend a two-year college and the 16% who went to attend vocational training

(Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). According to Wagner and Blackorby (1996), altering secondary school offerings can make a difference on the success rate of students with disabilities after they leave secondary school.

Data indicates the number of students with disabilities entering post-secondary education facilities has been rising (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). According to Grigal and Neubert (2004), parents of students with low or high incidence disabilities share a common desire of wanting their children to go on to college. However, the actual number of students with ID going on to a two or four year degree school is very small, only 11% (Grigal et al., 2011b). According to Griffin, McMillian, and Hodapp (2010), “the limited number of PSE options available, and lack of knowledge about these options by professionals and families, may also contribute to low attendance” (as cited in Grigal et al., 2011b, p. 2). Overall, the research suggests that students with disabilities other than ID tend to have more success in PSE (Grigal et al., 2011a).

While these numbers may be on the low side, they have been increasing, possibly due to the increase in inclusive practices that occur in elementary and secondary schools (Causton-Theoharis, Ashby, & DeClouette, 2009). Individuals view inclusion in college as a logical next step to integrating these students into the world (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2009). According to Causton-Theoharis et al. (2009), the participating students at these schools have disabilities including: cognitive and intellectual disabilities, traumatic brain injury, and autism. An average of 2,000-3,000 students with disabilities transition from high school each year (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2009). Yet, according to Grigal et al. (2011b), very few of these students are making their way to institutions of higher education. A qualitative study, which assessed two programs in Central New York that

provide services for students with disabilities, found that the benefits of educating students with disabilities on campus were generally positive for all involved, including the students with disabilities, college classmates, and college faculty (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2009). With proven benefits, increased inclusive practices within secondary school settings, and changing legislature; it is highly probable that the number and type of these programs will increase and diversify in the years to come (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2009).

Types of Programs

According to Plotner and Marshall (2015), there are over 220 PSE programs in the United States for students with disabilities that fit into three categories. They include the substantively separate model, the mixed or hybrid model, and the inclusive, individualized support model. The substantively separate model refers to programs that are set up on campus, focus on life skills training, and are separate from the rest of the student population (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). The mixed or hybrid model has students participating in inclusive academic coursework and social activities, while also receiving life skills support when necessary (Plotner & Marshall, 2015). Finally, the inclusive, individualized support model has students participating in inclusive settings while receiving individualized support for activities and coursework (Plotner & Marshall, 2015).

Threshold Program. Many of the programs for students with disabilities that are considered to follow the substantially separate model are “generally older programs started in the 1970’s and 1980’s as an educational approach for educating students with learning disabilities” (Hafner, 2008, p. 29). One such program is the Threshold Program

at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Hafner, 2008). Students who participate in the Threshold Program have the opportunity of earning a certificate of completion and six college credits (Hafner, 2008). The program focuses on educating students in independent living and functional skills, which are carried over to the separate housing facilities offered on campus and supervised by live-in staff members (Hafner, 2008).

UI REACH. According to Hendrickson, Carson, Woods-Groves, Mendenhall, and Scheidecker (2013a), the University of Iowa Realizing Educational and Career Hopes (UI REACH) is a two year certificate program for students with ID and is considered a mixed model program due to the integration of inclusive courses and social experiences. The program focuses on giving students a true college experience, while focusing on four key concepts: inclusive life style, individualized planning and academic enhancement, career development and internships, and post-program support (Hendrickson et al., 2013a). An analysis of UI REACH was conducted and focused on the student population, the curriculum used, the staffing needs, and operational issues that arise (Hendrickson et al., 2013a). In addition, the opinions of 14 students within the UI REACH program were collected and analyzed (Hendrickson et al., 2013a).

The results of the analysis were generally positive in regards to meeting student needs and helping them adjust to the college lifestyle (Hendrickson et al., 2013a). According to Hendrickson, Vander Busard, Rodgers, & Scheidecker (2013b), transition practices at UI REACH help support the students and their families, and help them build strong relationships. Social interactions are promoted using mentors and RAs (Hendrickson et al., 2013b). Finally, a comparison between first year UI-REACH

students and first year college students was done through the completion of the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being and Openness to Diversity/Challenge Scale (Hendrickson et al., 2013b). The results indicated that there was no significant difference to how these two groups of students acclimated in their first year on campus, which suggests that the UI-REACH program is providing the needed support to make students with ID successful in their post-secondary educational programs (Hendrickson et al., 2013b).

SHEP. According to Kleinert, Jones, Sheppard-Jones, Harp, and Harrison (2012), there is a rising need for PSE programs for students with disabilities. Participation in higher education programs results in increased job opportunities and higher pay for those jobs (Sheppard-Jones, Reilly, & Jones, 2013). The pilot project SHEP (Supported Higher Education Project) of Kentucky was funded through a five year grant from the U.S. Office of Postsecondary Education so students with Intellectual Disabilities have a growing choice of higher education programs to develop their skills and increase their ability to secure a well suited job (Kleinert et al., 2012; Sheppard-Jones et al., 2013).

SHEP, an inclusive, individualized support model, works closely with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in order to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment that focuses on a specific job and the steps needed to reach that goal (Sheppard-Jones et al., 2013). Often, higher education is a step in that plan for students with disabilities. Developing a strong relationship with “VR agencies is critical to sustaining opportunities in higher education for this population” (Sheppard-Jones et al., 2013, p. 3). According to Kleinert et al. (2012), PSE programs like SHEP will have

many implications for secondary education teachers. These include topics of transition planning, inclusion within the general education curriculum, and inclusion within extracurricular activities that will promote social skills and confidence (Kleinert et al., 2012).

Dual Enrollment. In addition to these three post-secondary models, current high school students may have access to dual enrollment programs. These programs offer college courses for students aged 18-21 who are still enrolled in high school (Hart & Weir, 2013). Across the country, school districts are partnering with local colleges to create dual enrollment programs for students with disabilities and offsetting costs by using IDEA funds to pay the tuition and other expenses (Hart & Weir, 2013). Similarly, vocational rehabilitation agencies are looking to forge partnerships with colleges as well to provide more opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

According to Tatnall (2014), the State University of New York (SUNY) Delhi and The Arc of Delaware County, NY (the Arc) established a partnership to promote their mutually desired outcome of promoting lifelong learning to all learners in the community. The target objectives for this partnership were to help all students learn more about themselves, help SUNY students develop leadership skills through inclusive interactions and partnerships, and develop career paths and independence for the Arc students (Tatnall, 2014). According to Tatnall (2014), many students with disabilities leave high school without having secured the opportunity to pursue some form of higher education. In order for these students to be exposed to the possibility of PSE, partnerships between the colleges and community agencies must be established (Tatnall, 2014). The partnership between SUNY and the Arc has allowed individuals with

disabilities to foster relationships, explore different jobs that will help develop their career path, and find successful employment.

Parent Concerns

While parents have a desire to see their children become independent problem solvers and contributors to society, they do not know how to impart these skills to their children. According to Benito (2012), many respondents noted a sense of unease and worry regarding what these students would be able to do after high school, not just because of the students' skill sets, but because of the lack of options and knowledge of those options available to educators and families. For those determined to pursue higher education for their children with disabilities, a new fear of what the campus lifestyle holds takes priority. The data indicates that safety is by far the greatest concern when considering sending their children to college (Griffin et al., 2010).

While student safety can play a major role in determining whether or not to send a student with disabilities to school, determining the school itself can be problematic. It is important, therefore, to consider the following programmatic practices of the school:

- duration and location,
- scope and focus,
- residential options,
- academic structure,
- community involvement,
- completion awards, and
- funding (Furgang Kertcher, 2014).

This lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown can be detrimental to student success. However, with the right information and awareness, students with disabilities can flourish in their transition from high school to PSE. According to Briel (2014), Eddie, a student with Autism and ID, was interviewed on his PSE success. He attended the Academic & Career Exploration: Individualized Techniques (ACE IT) in College at Virginia Commonwealth University. ACE IT is a program designed to enable students with ID to attend college (Briel, 2014). By completing the program, Eddie's reading level increased and he developed a work resume that allowed him to secure a job within Amazon's fulfillment center (Briel, 2014).

Employment

According to Smith, Grigal, and Sulewski (2012), the American Community Survey (ACS) collects data on disability, education, and employment beyond what the national census survey collects. According to this data, individuals with disabilities between the ages of 18-25 attended post-secondary education programs at rates much lower than their peers without disabilities (Smith et al., 2012). Likewise with post-secondary employment, students with ID reported lower numbers of having and maintaining a paid job (Grigal et al., 2011a). According to Smith et al. (2012), the chi square test was used "for each disability subpopulation to determine if there is/was a statistical relationship between postsecondary enrollment and employment" (p. 2-3). According to the authors, a statically significant difference was found in the data that showed higher employment rates for students who were enrolled in a PSE program (Smith et al., 2012). This relationship between education and employment supports the

transition path of pursuing higher education in order to increase the employment outcomes for students with disabilities (Smith et al., 2012).

A core objective for institutions of higher education is preparing students for competitive employment. According to Grigal and Hart (2010), “traditional transition experiences of students with intellectual disabilities have not been demonstrated to produce great outcomes for students in adulthood” (p. 2). They are limited to teacher directed job tryouts that do not necessarily lead to securing a paid position after completing high school (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Having the opportunity to pursue higher education allows these students to explore personal interests and receive education in areas that will help them secure meaningful employment (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Of the college programs created for students with disabilities, many of them are considered dual enrollment transition programs. These programs are designed for students between the ages of 18-21 to receive their final years of high school education within a college program (Grigal & Dwyre, 2010). A goal of this type of setup is to focus on employment so the student is able find a career in which he can be successful (Grigal & Dwyre, 2010). According to the research, the majority of the students who participated in this type of program had secured paid employment after they left the program (Grigal & Dwyre, 2010). A goal of all higher education graduates is to embark on a successful career path; students with disabilities are no exception to this objective.

Like most individuals, finding the right fit in a job can boost one’s self-esteem, work productivity, and social interactions (Johnson Vitali De Bonda, 2012). It is important to make sure the needs of persons with ID are being taken into consideration when finding long-term employment for them. According to Johnson Vitali De Bonda

(2012), when the needs of individuals with disabilities are accounted for, the individuals can succeed and flourish at their jobs. However, when accommodations and exceptions are not made the result can end with both the individual being discontent and a decrease in the work productivity. While this research was conducted in Italy, it opens up a pertinent area of study that should be examined. More information is needed to better understand the needs of individuals with disabilities in the workforce and how their PSE programs prepared, or did not prepare, them for their jobs. By continuing to collect data on these students and their outcomes, changes can be made to better affect future students' employment outcomes and their participation in PSE programs.

Synthesis

Post-secondary education for students with ID is an up and coming trend in special education; however, much work still remains to create quality, standardized programs that will meet the needs of a wide range of individuals with disabilities. Gaps in the research remain within the field of how students with disabilities fare after completing their secondary education. Likewise, little literature was available to reflect the perspectives of school district educators and administrators on continuing education for students with disabilities.

While most parents see their children as “normal,” that viewpoint is often not held in all environments. Teachers and students without disabilities must be educated on the benefits of inclusion for not only the students, but for themselves as well. More studies are needed to fully understand the benefits of inclusion within the secondary and higher education fields for all parties involved.

In reaction to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, states all over the country are developing guidelines, standards, and taxonomies that will result in the development of quality higher education programs for students with disabilities. However, a need remains to create a national set of standards and guidelines to help higher education institutions create consistent programs for students with disabilities. Once generated, this will lead into the development of inclusive jobs and career paths for these students, as well as the restructuring of the transition process across the educational board. Studies must be conducted to generate a consensus of how PSE programs for students with disabilities should function.

Once these practices are addressed, refined, and fully instituted; a third phase of the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students must be administered to compare and contrast the advancements that have been made in the last 30 years of special education practices.

Despite these positive advancements, a need still exists in the literature to identify educator perspectives on the secondary transition process and perceptions of post-secondary education programs. This author suggests that an examination of these topics be conducted to develop data unique to the researcher's local area.

Summary

Continuing education is an aspiration that has been out of reach for many individuals with disabilities. Three strands of literature were reviewed to examine what developments in this field are being made and to note the areas within the literature that remain in need of further study. Transition Planning reviewed the process that all students with disabilities must go through while in their secondary school placement, the

problems that arise while planning, parent and educator perceptions of this process, and the student's role and desired traits before, during, and after transition. Post-Secondary Education explored how current law, including HEOA, has allowed students with disabilities to receive funding to continue their education and has defined ID so higher education institutions can begin developing appropriate programs. PSE development guidelines were explored, along with how to increase awareness of these programs for students with disabilities, and how the Think College Standards are helping to develop consistency. In addition, types of PSE programs for students with disabilities were analyzed, along with notable concerns parents have regarding sending their children with disabilities to college. Finally, Employment was explored to reveal how students with disabilities are faring in the workforce and how PSE can help increase their employment opportunities.

While the available literature provided an adequate synopsis of the field of study, many gaps still remain. To better understand the needs of students with ID and to prepare quality transition plans for them to be successful, additional research must be conducted within the fields of; parent and educator opinions of the secondary transition process, parent and educator knowledge of PSE programs, PSE program outcomes, benefits of student inclusion, and current NLTS data.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Within the last decade, higher education has been made available to a wider range of students, including those with disabilities (VanBergeijk & Cavanagh, 2012). This study intended to measure the perspectives, perceptions, and knowledge base that teachers and support personnel had regarding how well the transition planning process prepared high school students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) for life after secondary education and how they viewed continuing education for these students.

While post-secondary education for students with ID is an increasing area of interest in special education, much work remains to create quality, standardized programs that will meet the needs of a wide range of individuals with disabilities. These areas require further research to identify what makes a quality program and how students can be integrated into these programs successfully. There are a limited number of programs available across the United States because the existence of these programs is relatively new. However, more programs are being developed every year to increase the pool and thus, a need existed to bring awareness of these programs to the potential students who would attend them. This research also assisted in evaluating the transition process that was currently in place for individuals with disabilities and how effective it was from the perspectives of the teachers and support personnel.

Six sites and one population were included in this study. The sites included a consortium of six school districts located in South Central Pennsylvania. The population of participants within the sites included special education teachers, administrators, school counselors, psychologists, related service personnel, and transition coordinators of high

school students with ID. An in-depth overview of the mixed methods research approach and designs will be explored in this chapter as well as a rationale explaining the benefits of using this type of approach. Further, the research sites will be examined, and the population and sample explored to provide a framework of the participants. Once an overview of the research method and sites is presented, the tools and strategies for collecting data can be examined, as well as the timeline of the research project. Finally, ethical considerations will be explored to identify any possible violation of participants' rights.

Research Design and Rationale

The quantitative data collection tool for this mixed methods study was a survey. Therefore, the quantitative survey design best fit the structure of this study. According to Creswell (2012), "survey studies describe trends in the data rather than offer rigorous explanations" (p. 376). It was the goal of this research to learn about the attitudes and opinions of the population rather than to predict outcomes (Creswell, 2012). More specifically, the cross-sectional survey design was used in this study to explore the population; special education teachers and support personnel of students with ID (Creswell, 2012). Cross-sectional surveys can help identify a population's beliefs and attitudes, as well as offer insights into the purpose and effectiveness of a program (Creswell, 2012).

While the qualitative research approaches all share some level of similarity, the grounded theory research design encompassed the temperament of this particular study. According to Creswell (2013), it is used in studies related to education and studies that rely primarily on interviewing, including focus groups, as the qualitative data collection.

This researcher was not trying to tell a story through the shared experiences of participants, but rather, elicit and develop a theory which would explain and answer the research questions related to continuing education and transition planning for students with disabilities (Creswell, 2013).

The mixed methods research design is used when both quantitative and qualitative data are needed to better understand the question or problem (Creswell, 2012). While all mixed methods studies collect both quantitative and qualitative data, the order in which the collection takes place can vary. For example, in the explanatory sequential design, quantitative data is collected first to lay a foundation for the study and then qualitative data is collected to support and understand the earlier data (Creswell, 2012). The support offered by the mixed methods study and the explanatory sequential design allowed for a better analysis of the specific research problem (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Based on the two research questions developed for this study, the mixed methods research approach, and more specifically the explanatory sequential design, provided the most beneficial data and results. Questions (1) and (2) lent themselves to quantitative analysis through surveys, followed by data collection through focus groups to illicit a more in-depth investigation into the thought processes of a sample of the participants.

The post-positivism approach is an epistemological position that holds that the goal of knowledge is simply to accept that the biases of the researcher can influence what is observed, and keep these biases in check by acknowledging them (Creswell, 2013). This researcher understood that biases would be present in everyone's research; the solution then was to acknowledge their existence and put measures in place to control their influences on the research. Further, while exploring the various research theories, it

was clear that this research was rooted in disability theory. According to Creswell (2013), disability theory “addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities” (p. 33).

Examining the foundation of the research problem, transition planning and continuing education for students with Intellectual Disabilities, and the participants used, teachers and support personnel; this study very clearly fit within the nature of disability theory.

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Site and Population

Population Description

One population group was included in this study. This group included the special education teachers and support personnel (administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators) of high school students with ID from six local school districts within South Central Pennsylvania. The majority of participants were female and teachers. The pool of participants was 80 school district personnel. A sample size calculator was used to determine the desirable sample size from the available population (SurveyMonkey, 2015). Based on a population of 80, a confidence level of 95%, and confidence interval of 5; the necessary sample size was 66

participants (SurveyMonkey, 2015). If, however, the confidence interval were increased to 10, a sample size of 44 participants would be required (SurveyMonkey, 2015). The actual sample size attained for this study was 32 participants, including 17 teachers and 15 support personnel. This equates to a confidence interval of 13.5, with a confidence level of 95%. Due to the low return rate, the results of this study cannot be considered statistically sound, but are able to provide information for the school districts involved.

This population provided information concerning what teachers and support personnel saw their students with disabilities doing after the completion of high school and how they viewed the transition planning process. This population contained six gatekeepers, four of which had a familiarity with the researcher. The gatekeepers were the Directors of Special Education at the school districts and provided the first link in the chain of communication with the assistant directors and/or supervisors of special education, teachers, and other support personnel.

District demographic information was acquired from each district through the gatekeepers. Demographic information included: size of the district, size of the high school, number of special education students at the high school, number of students with ID at the high school, number of special education administrators, number of district psychologists, number of high school counselors, number of special education teachers at the high school, number of ID teachers at the high school, setting of the school district, and average income of the school district. The demographic information for each school district can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

School District Population and Site Demographics

<u>School District</u>	<u>SD-1</u>	<u>SD-2</u>	<u>SD-3</u>	<u>SD-4</u>	<u>SD-5</u>	<u>SD-6</u>	<u>Totals</u>
District Size	2,602	5,100	8,549	3,859	3,284	3,353	26,747
HS Size	888	1,511	2,577	1,136	999	1,053	8,164
SE Population at HS	168	204	292	136	134	179	1,113
ID Population at HS	12	19	18	20	15	14	98
SE Administrators	2	2	3	1	1	1	10
Psychologists	1	1	8	1	2	2	15
Counselors at HS	2	5	8	4	3	3	25
SE Teachers at HS	14	10	25	9	8	10	76
ID Teachers at HS	4	3	11	5	4	3	30
School District Setting	Rural	Urban/ Suburban	Suburban	Suburban	Rural/ Suburban	Rural	-
Average Income	\$61,381	\$64,974	\$61,417	\$73,867	\$81,376	\$61,076	\$67,349

Note. HS stands for high school. SE stands for special education. ID stands for Intellectual Disability.

Sample Description

Total population sampling was used in this study. According to Lund Research (2012), total population sampling is used by researchers when the population that has the desired set of characteristics that are of interest to the researcher is very small. The population of this study was smaller than 100. The sample used included the teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators who had direct interaction with students with ID for each school district. All members within this sample were sent an invitation to participate in the study, as well as a letter of informed consent. The special education directors from each school district were asked to provide a list of their high school teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators who work with special education students. These individuals, along with the directors, made up the school district personnel used in the study.

Site Description

Six sites were included in this study. The sites formed a consortium of school districts located within South Central Pennsylvania. The school districts were assigned pseudonyms, which were used throughout the rest of the study. They were SD-1, SD-2, SD-3, SD-4, SD-5, and SD-6. The consortium liaisons included the Directors of Special Education and the Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent of each district. The liaisons met approximately one time per month at alternating locations to discuss relevant district matters, including special education programs, parent training sessions, and student placement. More detailed site information for each school district is included in Table 1.

The researcher worked within SD-1 and had a professional relationship with the Directors of Special Education at SD-2, SD-5, and SD-6. Communication had started before the study began and an introduction to the research was made with the gatekeepers of the school districts, which laid the foundation to obtain permission to collect data within the consortium. Costs were kept to a minimum due to the nature of the quantitative and qualitative data collection at this site; online surveys and focus groups. Since the researcher worked within the consortium, the site provided convenience.

Research Methodology

Stages of Data Collection

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the research methodologies used in this study.

Table 2

Research Methodologies

Research Question	Data Collection	Type of Analysis
What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?	Survey	Descriptive Statistics
	Focus Groups	Comparison of Means
		ANOVA
		Thematic Coding
What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?	Survey	Descriptive Statistics
	Focus Groups	Comparison of Means
		ANOVA
		Thematic Coding

Within this mixed methods study, two types of data collection were used. The data collected was used to better understand the perceptions and expectations of the teachers and support personnel. The data collection tools used included:

- online surveys
- focus groups (Creswell, 2012).

There were two phases of data collection within this study. The first phase included the collection of quantitative survey data. According to Creswell (2012), surveys are used to describe trends, determine opinions, and identify attitudes. One version of the survey tool was used to collect data from both the teachers and the support personnel. An initial email was sent to the participants explaining the study and requesting their participation in the study. Survey access was sent out electronically to the participants, along with follow-up reminders to increase return rate. Data collection for the first phase took six weeks to complete.

The second phase for this study was qualitative focus groups. According to Creswell (2012), focus groups are used to “collect a shared understanding” from the group (p. 218). Two focus group sessions were conducted, one for the teachers and another for the support personnel. The target participation goal for each group was three to five participants. Three individuals gave their consent to participate in each of the two focus groups resulting in six focus group participants. Focus groups allow the researcher to collect detailed information from and opinions of the participants on specific aspects of the study (Creswell, 2012). The focus groups were conducted in a private setting and were used to enhance the statistical data collected from the surveys. Data collection for the second phase took two weeks to complete.

Figure 3 shows a detailed timeline, which outlines the aforementioned activities for each month of the study period.











	March	April	May	June	July	August
Open Survey						
Distribute Invitations and Advertisements						
Collect Survey Data						
Send Reminders						
Close Survey						
Quantitative Analysis						
Award Gift Cards						
Conduct Focus Groups						
Qualitative Analysis						
Write Findings and Conclusions						

Figure 3. Study timeline.

The timeline for the study was six months. The data collected from the survey took place first. The survey was opened on March 14, 2016, and was concluded on April 24, 2016. During this time, reminders were sent to participants in order to increase the survey completion rate. Analysis of survey data followed during the months of April, May, and June. In addition, gift cards were awarded during the month of May to 10 randomly selected participants. Focus group sessions and artifact collection took place during the last week of July. Analysis of the focus group data followed during the month of August, along with the writing of the findings and conclusions for this study.

Instrument Description – Quantitative Surveys

A prepared and tested survey tool entitled *Florida College Collaborative Survey: Educator/Professional Version* was acquired from Nila Benito (2010) and was used by the researcher to collect demographic information and data for question (2). The survey contained 13 questions, 11 of which were included in the survey tool. The questions included six multiple choice questions, three open-ended questions, and four Likert scale type questions. This survey was selected due to its ability to provide data regarding continuing education for students with disabilities, which helped to answer research question (2). Two additional prepared and tested survey tools entitled *School Characteristic Survey* and *School Program Survey* were acquired from NLTS2 (2001) and were used by the researcher to collect data for question (1). The surveys contained 48 and 64 questions respectively. Only three questions from the *School Characteristic Survey* and 11 from the *School Program Survey* were relevant to use in this study. The questions selected from these surveys included one open-ended question, two Likert scale type questions, four dichotomous questions, and seven multiple choice questions. These

surveys were selected due to their ability to provide data regarding transition practices for students with disabilities, which helped to answer research question (1). The questions from these three survey tools were combined to develop the survey, which was used for data collection in this study.

Although the questions from these surveys had never been used in isolation before, there was evidence to support why they were used in the study. NLTS2 collected data from parents, youth, and schools over a 10-year period regarding 11,270 adolescents, ages 13-16, to provide a national picture of the experiences and achievements as these individuals transitioned into early adulthood (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 [NLTS2], n.d.).

The study:

- Describes the characteristics of secondary school youth in special education and their households.
- Describes the secondary school experiences of youth in special education, including their schools, school programs, related services, and extracurricular activities.
- Describes the experiences of youth once they leave secondary school, including adult programs and services, social activities, etc.
- Measures the secondary school and postschool outcomes of youth in the education, employment, social, and residential domains.
- Identifies factors in youth's secondary school and postschool experiences that contribute to more positive outcomes. (NLTS2, n.d.)

Regarding Benito's survey,

In 2010, the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities (FCIC) coordinated a variety of activities to promote inclusive postsecondary education (PSE) for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). One activity was bringing together a diverse group to create the Florida College Collaborative. This group included representatives from two year and four-year colleges, community and state agencies, and K-12 education, as well as students with IDD and their parents. The goal was to develop a sustainable, authentic, and inclusive PSE system to support students with IDD. The Florida College Collaborative conducted two parallel statewide web surveys, one for professionals who support people with IDD and another for families of youth with IDD. The surveys gathered perspectives about PSE for students with IDD and information on current practices. They asked about students' hopes and dreams and about barriers to their participation in PSE programs. 353 people completed the professional survey, and 553 people completed the family survey. (Benito, 2012)

These surveys had been tested in previous research studies and the findings had since been published in various academic journals. It was the belief of the researcher that the merging of specific transition and continuing education related questions from the three separate tools into one new survey tool would produce relevant and statistically significant findings regarding the research questions.

The purpose of the survey was to determine the general perceptions that teachers and support personnel had for students with ID after they concluded their secondary education, to determine if there was prior knowledge of local higher education programs

available for students with disabilities, and their overall perspectives on the transition process. Please see Appendix A for a sample of the survey tool.

Quantitative Participant Selection, Identification and Invitation

Total population sampling was used in this study. According to Lund Research (2012), total population sampling is used by researchers when the population that has the desired set of characteristics that are of interest to the researcher is very small and warrants the inclusion of the entire population as possible participants. The population of this study was smaller than 100. Therefore, using total population sampling increased the total number of participants. Participants included the special education teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators of high school students with ID. According to Lund Research (2012), a list of the population must be made when using total population sampling. Use of a gatekeeper is encouraged to complete this task (Lund Research, 2012). The special education directors from each school district were asked to provide a list of their high school educators and support personnel who worked with special education students with ID. These individuals, along with the special education directors, made up the participants to be used in the study. An Invitation and Letter of Informed Consent was emailed to the teachers and support personnel. Please see Appendix B for a sample of the email invitation.

While invitations and letters of consent were initially issued via email to introduce the study to the participants, record of the consent process took place on the online survey tool. The Letter of Informed Consent was included on the first page of the online survey. The selected survey system, Qualtrics, recorded the responses with an electronic

signature and time stamp. The survey required the participants to agree to provide consent before continuing with the survey. Those who did not provide consent were not able to continue with the survey. Those who provided consent were able to print a copy of the signed letter of consent for their personal records. Participation remained voluntary throughout the survey. If any participant chose to terminate their participation in the survey before it was completed, their previously collected data, up to the point of termination, was excluded from the results. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to confirm submission of their responses. Those who did not confirm submission were withdrawn from the study. This researcher followed the *SOP: Informed Consent Process for Research HRP-090*. Please see Appendix C for a sample of the Survey - Letter of Informed Consent.

All participant information was kept confidential. Survey results were catalogued using numerical identifiers to help protect the participants' identities from being revealed based on any information that was given on the survey such as school district names (Creswell, 2012). School district personnel were sent an email explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation in the data collection. The invitation included a direct link and web address to complete the online survey.

In addition, each participant had the option of being included in a random drawing for one of ten \$20 gift cards as an incentive to participate in the survey. In order to be entered in the drawing, participants received a statement at the end of the online survey explaining the drawing. If the participant wanted to be enrolled in the drawing, he/she clicked on the provided link, was taken to a secondary site, and was asked to provide his/her name, email address, and phone number. The secondary site was not connected to

the survey site in any way and none of the information provided could be linked back to the survey responses. Any individual who terminated his/her participation in the survey was not eligible for the gift card drawing. The drawing for the gift cards took place after quantitative data was collected, at the beginning of the third month of the study. Ten participants were randomly selected and mailed their choice of a \$20 gift card to Wal-Mart or Target.

Quantitative Data Collection

An online survey tool, Qualtrics was used to collect and record the data. This system allowed all survey results to be automatically uploaded to SPSS for analysis (Creswell, 2012). All survey data was stored on a password protected, encrypted drive on the researcher's computer. Please see Table 2 for the methodological table.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey data was prepared, scored, and entered into SPSS for analysis to take place. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data first because it allowed the researcher to identify the general tendencies in the data (mean, median, or mode). These descriptive statistics were used to lay the foundation for the inferential statistical analyses that followed. For this study, calculated means were needed for further analytical tests to be run. Therefore, descriptive statistics were used to calculate the individual means for each closed survey question. These means were then used to perform a general mean comparison test to determine what data were statistically significant in order to answer research questions (1) and (2).

The data for research questions (1) and (2) were further tested by using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which is used "to compare the means of two or more

independent samples and to test whether the differences between the means are statistically significant” (Ravid, 2011, p. 158). The use of the ANOVA is warranted for data that meets the parameters of parametrical data, or data that is being measured on an interval scale, as with Likert scale questions, which were included in the survey tool (Ravid, 2011). Further, Cronbach’s coefficient alpha was used to determine reliability and validity of the survey tool.

According to Ravid (2011), the level of significance for researchers is typically set at $p \leq .05$, where the p level indicates the probability that the findings are statistically significant. According to Ravid (2011), this p level is the acceptable level of significance to be used with the ANOVA test. Following the analysis, trends in the data were described and correlations between the variables were made (Creswell, 2012; Ravid, 2011). The independent variables in this study were the teachers and the support personnel. The dependent variables were the perspectives and perceptions. Once these trends were isolated, answers to the research questions were developed to determine an overall interpretation of the perspectives and perceptions teachers and support had regarding higher education for students with disabilities and the high school transition process (Creswell, 2012).

Instrument Description – Qualitative Focus Groups

According to Creswell (2012), the systematic design of grounded theory “emphasizes the use of data analysis steps of open, axial, and selective coding, and the development of a logic paradigm or a visual picture of the theory generated” (p. 424). This research intended to elicit and develop a theory through coding of the data, which

would explain and answer the research questions related to continuing education and transition planning for students with disabilities (Creswell, 2013).

A focus group tool was made from the 25-question survey tool that was used for the quantitative data collection portion of this study. Two focus groups were used to collect data to help strengthen and support the answers for research questions (1) and (2) based on the survey data that was collected. The survey tools were derived from established surveys developed by Nila Benito (2010) and NLTS2 (2001), more information concerning these tools can be found under the *Instrument Description – Quantitative Surveys* section. The specific questions to be used on the focus group tool were derived from the analysis of the quantitative survey data; three questions deemed as statistically significant were included in the focus groups, in addition, two other questions that did not come back as statistically significant were also included to gain a more robust sample of the participants' insights. The reason behind this selection method was to follow the true nature of the explanatory sequential design, which is to collect qualitative data, which explains or elaborates on the previously collected quantitative data (Creswell, 2012). This data was used to determine teacher and support personnel perspectives regarding the secondary transition process and how it prepared students with ID for post-secondary education.

Two focus groups were used, one for teachers and one for support personnel. The purpose of the focus groups was to determine the general perceptions that teachers and support personnel had for students with ID after they conclude their secondary education, to determine if there was prior knowledge of local higher education programs available

for students with disabilities, and their overall perspectives on the transition process.

Please see the Appendix D for a sample of the focus group tool.

Qualitative Participant Selection, Identification and Invitation

Participants included the special education teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators of high school students with ID who completed the survey. A pool of 32 individuals was used, including 17 teachers and 15 support personnel. Two focus groups were held after the collection and analysis of the survey data, one for teachers and one for support personnel. This population of participants was comprised of those individuals who completed the online survey and agreed to participate in the follow-up focus group. The target participation goal for each group was three to five participants. Three individuals gave their consent to participate in each of the two focus groups resulting in six focus group participants. Each of these participants signed a new consent form to participate in the focus groups. Please see Appendix E for a sample of the Focus Group - Letter of Informed Consent.

Participation remained voluntary throughout the process. If any participant chose to terminate her participation in the focus group before it was completed, her previously collected data, up to the point of termination, was excluded from the results at the participant's request. If no request was made to exclude the previously collected data, the data was kept for analysis. The researcher posed this question to any individual who requested to terminate her participation in the focus group. Termination of participation in the focus group had no effect on the inclusion of the previously collected survey data.

All participant information was kept confidential. Each focus group participant was provided with a numerical identifier to protect the participants' identities from being

revealed based on any information that may have been given within the group discussion (Creswell, 2012). Participants received an email explaining the purpose of the focus group and requesting their participation in the additional phase of data collection. If the participant agreed to participate in the focus group, she was asked to provide information regarding her availability to participate in the session.

Qualitative Data Collection

The focus group sessions were audio recorded by the researcher. The audio recordings were then transcribed to aid in the data analysis. Numerical identifiers were included in the transcription to ensure that participants remained unequivocally anonymous. In addition, notes were taken by the researcher to provide accurate interpretation of the comments made during the data collection (Creswell, 2012). The locations of the focus groups were set-up at the convenience of the participants. Please see Table 2 for the methodological table.

Qualitative Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2012), “there is no single, accepted approach to analyzing qualitative data, although several guidelines exist for this process” (p. 238). Creswell (2012) suggests that thematic analysis “moves away from reporting the ‘facts’ to making an interpretation of people and activities” (p. 473). The focus group data was analyzed through thematic analysis by using open and axial coding, as supported by the grounded theory framework. First, the data was organized and transcribed (Creswell, 2012). Open coding and computer analysis was then conducted on the data in order to assign coding categories for themes that emerged from the data (Merriam, 2009). This was followed by axial coding which selected one open coding category and related others to it (Merriam,

2009). These relationships were portrayed on coding paradigms, which can be found in chapter four. Once these relationships were identified, they were used to determine an overall theory of the perceptions that teachers and support personnel had regarding higher education for students with disabilities and the transition process, through selective coding (Merriam, 2009). These theories were used to supplement the data that was collected through the surveys.

Summary

The mixed methods research approach and design fit well with the nature of the study. Specifically the explanatory sequential design allowed for quantitative data to be collected first, with the qualitative data providing support and elaboration of the groups', teachers and support personnel, attitudes and opinions (Creswell, 2012). Online surveys and focus groups were utilized to collect data. Participation was voluntary for all subjects and identities were kept confidential. Once the data was collected, analysis was performed to isolate trends and theories, and to develop answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher had participated in qualitative and quantitative research courses while pursuing the degree of Doctor of Education through Drexel University's Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management program. Further, the researcher had successfully completed training through CITI for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research – RCR and Social, Behavioral and Educational Research Investigators. The researcher's dissertation committee chair, Lori Severino, Ed.D., was

an Assistant Clinical Professor and the Program Director of Special Education at Drexel University.

According to Creswell (2012), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was developed to monitor adherence to three basic principles within biomedical and behavioral research. These three principles are beneficence of treatment of participants, respect for participants, and justice (Creswell, 2012). This study involved indirect contact through surveys and direct contact through focus groups. In order to document the precautions and considerations taken with the population for this study, IRB approval was obtained. Formal school district consent was acquired by the researcher in the form of the *HRP-504 School Permission to Conduct Research Letter*. Each school district in the consortium that participated in the study submitted a signed HRP-504 letter to the researcher.

In addition, all data collected was stored using the researcher's privately owned drive to ensure the data was secure, regularly backed-up, and encrypted. This drive required login credentials known only to the researcher to keep the data protected. Hard copies of any data were secured in a key lock safe owned by the researcher. The researcher was the only individual who had access to the key. The data will be kept for a period of no less than three years, but not exceeding ten years, at which time all electronic data records will be deleted and paper records destroyed. Data may be released to the consortium of districts at the superintendents' request. Requests must be presented to the researcher in writing by formal letter that is signed and dated by the superintendent of the district making the request. Participants were informed that the release of data to the districts was possible. This information was included on the Letter

of Informed Consent and Invitation to Participate. The IRB approval provided assurance to both the researcher and participants that the appropriate steps had been taken to protect their rights and welfare, and ensured quality control of the data collection and storage. Further, obtaining IRB approval provided a sense of protection and safety for the participants and possibly aided in obtaining higher participation rates.

The quantitative ethical considerations surrounding this research included surveys. A detailed overview and explanation of the research was provided to all participants. Individuals had the option of participating in the research or withdrawing at any time. All surveys were conducted anonymously and participants were assigned a numerical identifier. In addition, all surveys were conducted online and did not impose any economic burden on the participants. The qualitative ethical considerations surrounding this research included focus groups. All participants in the qualitative portion of data collection were informed of the purpose of the study and were given the option to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. During qualitative data collection numerical identifiers were used in place of real names to protect the participants' identities.

Other ethical considerations included minimizing the disruption at the data collection site. The researcher conducted data collection with minimal disturbance so as not to create disorder for the participants. The purpose of this research was to bring awareness of continuing education programs for students with disabilities and to assess the transition process from the perspectives of the teachers and support personnel. The potential benefits of this study included increased awareness of higher education programs designed for students with disabilities, better understanding of the transition

planning process, improved transition planning practices for educators of students with disabilities, and long term improvements made to the transition planning practices of the consortium of school districts included in this study. The names of the sites used in the data collection were coded to provide anonymity for the schools.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Purpose of the Study

It was the purpose of this mixed methods study to research the perspectives and knowledge base of teachers and support personnel (administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators) on the high school transition process and procedures, and their perceptions and knowledge base on continuing education for students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID). This area of study has had a great amount of attention focused on it in the United States within the last decade due to the reauthorization of Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008. Several initiatives benefiting students with disabilities were included in the final legislation including access to funds, grants, and materials. In addition, it offered a definition for ID which made it possible for these students to be eligible for the legislation outlined in HEOA and for many institutions of higher education to become eligible for grants to develop programs specifically for this sect of students (Madaus, Kowitt, & Lalor, 2012).

Research Questions

To evaluate the expectations of post-secondary life, the perceptions of continuing education, and the effectiveness of the secondary special education transition planning process for students with Intellectual Disabilities, a mixed methods study was conducted utilizing surveys and focus groups. Two questions drove this research:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Quantitative Findings

The first phase of this study included the collection of quantitative survey data. One version of the survey tool was used to collect data from both the teachers and the support personnel participants. An initial email was sent to participants explaining the study and requesting their participation in the study. Survey access was sent out electronically to the participants, along with follow-up reminders to increase the return rate. Data collection for the first phase took six weeks to complete.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the reliability and validity of the survey tool. This method allowed the researcher to measure how well the items on the tool agreed or correlated with each other (Ravid, 2011). According to Ravid (2011), "coefficient alpha can be used for tests with various item formats," this aligned with the survey tool developed for this research study (p. 196). Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.346	.444	35

Note. A reliability coefficient > .70 is acceptable.

The reliability coefficient for the survey tool was .346; this is smaller than the desired coefficient value of .70, or greater. However, since the items on this survey tool had been used in previous studies, their inclusion and clustering on the tool for this study was reasonable and necessary.

Participant Demographic Data Overview

Demographic data for the participants is presented in Table 4. The demographic data presented in this table includes the following categories: gender, participants' relationship with the student(s), and the attending school district. In addition the following information can also be found within Table 4: types of disabilities with which participants worked (as reported by the participant), types of high school programming provided, participants in transition meetings, and how the majority of students with disabilities would earn their diploma.

No data were collected from the actual high school students due to the students being minors with disabilities. These matters would have required a more involved consent process that was not practical for the time frame of this study. The exclusion of this group did not impact the study negatively as the purpose was to ascertain the perspectives and perceptions, regarding the transition process and continuing education, of the school district personnel who work with these students.

The survey invitation was sent out electronically to 80 school district personnel. Thirty-two individuals, or 40% of the population, completed the survey. Of the 32 participants, 17, or 53.1%, were teachers and 15, or 46.9%, were support personnel. Support personnel were defined as the special education directors for the school district, school psychologists, high school guidance counselors, transition coordinators, and

support coordinators. Five participants started, but did not complete the survey. All data from these participants was excluded from the data analysis. Regarding the types of disabilities with which the participants worked, the type of high school programming provided, and the participants in the transition meetings; participants were instructed to select all the choices that applied to their students. Therefore, these data do not tabulate to a final percent of total in Table 4.

Regarding the data presented in Table 4, there are two notable areas for discussion: questions six and 16. Regarding question six: earning of diploma; 10 teachers, or 31.3%, indicated that their students would earn their diploma through traditional credits, while only four support personnel, or 12.5%, selected this response. Looking at completion of IEP goals to earn the diploma, seven teachers, or 21.9%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.3%, noted this response. While an analysis of this data did not result in any statistical significance, there does appear to be a slight difference in opinion regarding how these students will earn their diplomas between the two groups.

Concerning question 16: who has participated in transition meetings; 10 teachers, or 31.3%, and 11 support personnel, or 34.4%, noted that a regular education teacher attended the transition meetings. According to PaTTAN (n.d.), at least one regular education member is required to attend an IEP meeting where transition planning is discussed. Likewise, 10 teachers, or 31.3%, and 14 support personnel, or 43.8%, noted that a school administrator attended the transition meetings. Again, this is another required member who should be attending IEP meetings where transition planning discussions take place (PaTTAN, n.d.).

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Demographic	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Female	14	43.8	9	28.1	23	71.9
Male	3	9.4	6	18.8	9	28.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q1. Relationship to Student						
Support Coordinator	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
Counselor	0	0	3	9.4	3	9.4
Psychologist	0	0	5	15.6	5	15.6
Transition Coordinator	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
Educator	17	53.1	0	0	17	53.1
Special Ed. Supervisor	0	0	5	15.6	5	15.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q2. School District						
SD-1	4	12.5	5	15.6	9	28.1
SD-2	2	6.3	1	3.1	3	9.4
SD-3	2	6.3	3	9.4	5	15.6
SD-4	5	15.6	3	9.4	8	25.0
SD-5	3	9.4	3	9.4	6	18.8
SD-6	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q3. Types of Disabilities						
Intellectual Disability	14	43.8	8	25.0	22	68.8
Down's Syndrome	8	25.0	6	18.8	14	43.8
Cerebral Palsy	1	3.1	4	12.5	5	15.6
Autism	11	34.4	9	28.1	20	62.5
Asperger Syndrome	5	15.6	8	25.0	13	40.6
Other	8	25.0	12	37.5	20	62.5
Q4. Type of Programing						
Some Gen. Ed. Classes	9	28.1	14	43.8	23	71.9
Pull Out Special Classes	7	21.9	15	46.9	22	68.8
Fully Inclusive	5	15.6	11	34.4	16	50.0
Special Residential	0	0	2	6.3	2	6.3
Home School	0	0	6	18.8	6	18.8
Work Based Learning Site	6	18.8	7	21.9	13	40.6
Community Instruct.	5	15.6	8	25.0	13	40.6
Other	2	6.3	1	3.1	3	9.4

Table 4 (continued)

Demographic	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q6. Earning of Diploma						
Traditional Credits	10	31.3	4	12.5	14	43.8
Completion of IEP Goals	7	21.9	10	31.3	17	53.1
Unsure	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q16. Who Has Participated in Transition Meetings						
General Ed. Teacher	10	31.3	11	34.4	21	65.6
Vocational Teacher	8	25.0	13	40.6	21	65.6
Special Ed. Teacher	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
School Administrator	10	31.3	14	43.8	24	75.0
Counselor/Psychologist	12	37.5	14	43.8	26	81.3
Related Service	8	25.0	10	31.3	18	56.3
Parent/Guardian	14	43.8	14	43.8	28	87.5
Student	15	46.9	15	46.9	30	93.8
VRA Counselor	9	28.1	8	25.0	17	53.1
Social Security Staff	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
Outside Agency	4	12.5	4	12.5	8	25.0
Employer	1	3.1	1	3.1	2	6.3
PSE Representative	0	0	2	6.3	2	6.3
Advocate	4	12.5	2	6.3	6	18.8
Other	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1

Transition Planning Basics Data Overview

Following the demographics section, participants were asked a series of questions that pertained to transition planning. The data summary for the transition planning basics questions can be found in Table 5. When asked what age transition planning began, 26 participants, or 81.3%, noted that this process began at age 14 or before, with only one individual indicating that it started at age 15. Two participants, or 6.3%, noted that planning began in ninth grade, one participant, or 3.1%, indicated it began in tenth grade,

and two participants, or 6.3%, did not answer the question. The responses to this question are noteworthy because in Pennsylvania transition planning must be started during the IEP in which the student will turn 14 (PaTTAN, n.d.). Due to six participants, or 18.8%, responding with an answer other than age 13 or 14, there could be a possible lack of knowledge concerning the age transition planning should begin.

All 32 participants, or 100%, indicated that transition planning had begun for all of their students. When asked whether students with disabilities receive instruction in transition planning, 12 teachers, or 37.5%, and 15 support personnel, or 46.9%, indicated that they do; while five teachers, or 15.6%, and zero support personnel stated that they do not. Regarding vocational education courses, 15 teachers, or 46.9%, and 15 support personnel, or 46.9%, noted that students receive instruction in vocational skills. Two teachers, or 6.3%, and zero support personnel noted that vocational courses were not included in the program. Twelve teachers, or 37.5%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.3%, responded that the programs offered students with disabilities a planned course of study. However, five teachers, or 15.6%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, responded that they did not have a planned course of study or were unsure.

The next question asked participants if their students and their students' parents understood all the educational opportunities available after high school. Nine teachers, or 28.1%, and nine support personnel, or 28.1%, responded that the students and their parents are aware of the opportunities available. However, eight teachers, or 25.0%, and six support personnel, or 18.8%, responded that the students and their parents were not aware of the opportunities available, or were unsure of the awareness. The data reflecting negative and unsure responses is concerning due to the fact that the IEP case manager is

required by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to share and facilitate discussion on secondary transition related materials with the student and the family by the time the student graduates from high school (PaTTAN, n.d.).

Responses varied significantly with regards to the final question in this section which asked about the role of the student in transition planning. Three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, stated the student was present for meetings but offered little or no input. Thirteen teachers, or 40.6%, and 12 support personnel, or 37.5%, noted that the student provided some input at transition planning meetings. One teacher, or 3.1%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, believed that the students took a leadership role in the transition planning process. According to these responses all participants indicated that the students attended the meetings. However, when looking back at the results of question 16, presented in Table 4 within the participant demographic data section, two teacher participants indicated that the students do not attend transition meetings. The differences between these two sets of data present a possible discrepancy between school district policy and actual practice with regards to student participation in transition planning meetings.

Further, this is an important question to examine because the purpose of a transition plan is to determine what the student will do after he completes high school. It is not an unrealistic expectation that the student would take a leadership role in planning his future, yet, only 6.3% of participants believed their students assumed this responsibility. The responses to this question will help in the development of possible recommendations presented in chapter five.

Table 5

Transition Planning Data Summary: Basics

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q7. Age Planning Begins						
13	0	0	3	9.4	3	9.4
14	14	43.8	9	28.1	23	71.9
15	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
9 th Grade	1	3.1	1	3.1	2	6.3
10 th Grade	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
Unsure	0	0	2	6.3	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q8. Transition Planning Begun						
Yes	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
No	0	0	0	0	0	0
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q9. Instruction in Transition Planning						
Yes	12	37.5	15	46.9	27	84.4
No	5	15.6	0	0	5	15.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q10. Vocational Education Courses						
Yes	15	46.9	15	46.9	30	93.8
No	2	6.3	0	0	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q11. Planned Course of Study						
Yes	12	37.5	10	31.3	22	68.8
No	3	9.4	2	6.3	5	15.6
Unsure	2	6.3	3	9.4	5	15.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q12e. Parents/Students Understand Opportunities						
Yes	9	28.1	9	28.1	18	56.3
No	6	18.8	1	3.1	7	21.9
Unsure	2	6.3	5	15.6	7	21.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Table 5 (continued)

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q17. Role of Student in Transition Planning						
Present, but No Input	3	9.4	2	6.3	5	15.6
Some Input	13	40.6	12	37.5	25	78.1
Leadership Role	1	3.1	1	3.1	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Transition Planning Goals Data Overview

Participants were then asked a series of questions pertaining to transition plan goals. The summary of this data can be found in Table 6. When asked to state the primary goal of students with disabilities after completing high school, six teachers, or 18.8%, and 11 support personnel, or 34.4%, noted that it was to find competitive employment, followed by six teachers, or 18.8%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, who believed it was supported employment. Four teachers, or 12.5%, and no support personnel selected continuing education as the primary goal, while one teacher, or 3.1%, noted independent living, one support personnel, or 3.1%, noted functional independence, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, indicated other. The majority of participants, 24, or 75.0%, selected some form of employment as the primary goal for their students. The second highest goal was continuing education, with four participants, or 12.5%, selecting this response. While this number is significantly lower than the employment category, it is noteworthy considering the amount of participants who responded in the survey that they believed their students would like to attend some form of continuing education. The

responses to this question (Q12d) can be found in Table 8 of the Continuing Education Data Overview Section.

Table 6

Transition Planning Data Summary: Goals

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q13. Primary Goal						
Competitive Employment	6	18.8	11	34.4	17	53.1
Supported Employment	6	18.8	1	3.1	7	21.9
Continuing Education	4	12.5	0	0	4	12.5
Live Independently	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
Functional Independence	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
Other/Unsure	0	0	2	6.3	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14a. Progress on Leaving HS Goal						
A Little	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
Some	8	25.0	10	31.3	18	56.3
A Lot	7	21.9	5	15.6	12	37.5
N/A	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14b. Progress on Vocational Goal						
A Little	4	12.5	2	6.3	6	18.8
Some	5	15.6	8	25.0	13	40.6
A Lot	8	25.0	5	15.6	13	40.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14c. Progress on Continuing Education Goal						
None	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
A Little	5	15.6	2	6.3	7	21.9
Some	7	21.9	11	34.4	18	56.3
A Lot	4	12.5	2	6.3	6	18.8
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Table 6 (continued)

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q14d. Progress on Independent Living Goal						
A Little	1	3.1	1	3.1	2	6.3
Some	10	31.3	5	15.6	15	46.9
A Lot	6	18.8	9	28.1	15	46.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14e. Progress on Behavior Goal						
A Little	3	9.4	2	6.3	5	15.6
Some	7	21.9	9	28.1	16	50.0
A Lot	4	12.5	4	12.5	8	25.0
N/A	3	9.4	0	0	3	9.4
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14f. Progress on Social/Interpersonal Goal						
A Little	2	6.3	1	3.1	3	9.4
Some	6	18.8	7	21.9	13	40.6
A Lot	6	18.8	7	21.9	13	40.6
N/A	3	9.4	0	0	3	9.4
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q14g. Progress on Self-Advocacy Goal						
A Little	2	6.3	0	0	2	6.3
Some	4	12.5	10	31.3	14	43.8
A Lot	11	34.4	4	12.5	15	46.9
N/A	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q15. Program Prepares Students to Meet Goals						
Somewhat	4	12.5	1	3.1	5	15.6
Fairly Well	10	31.3	10	31.3	20	62.5
Very Well	3	9.4	4	12.5	7	21.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Next, participants shared their perspectives on the progress students made on their transition related goals. The progress ranged from none, a little, some, or a lot. These

goals included leaving high school, vocational skills, continuing education, independent living, behavior management, social and interpersonal, and self-advocacy. Regarding leaving high school, one teacher, or 3.1%, indicated a little progress; eight teachers, or 25.0%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.3%, indicated some progress; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, indicated a lot of progress; and one teacher, or 3.1%, indicated not applicable. Concerning vocational goals, four teachers, or 12.5%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, indicated a little progress; five teachers, or 15.6.0%, and eight support personnel, or 25.0%, indicated some progress; and eight teachers, or 25.0%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, indicated a lot of progress. When asked about continuing education goals, one teacher, or 3.1%, indicated no progress; five teachers, or 15.6%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, indicated a little progress; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and 11 support personnel, or 34.4%, indicated some progress; and four teachers, or 12.5%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, indicated a lot of progress. For the independent living goal, one teacher, or 3.1%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, indicated a little progress; 10 teachers, or 31.3%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, indicated some progress; and six teachers, or 18.8%, and nine support personnel, or 28.1%, indicated a lot of progress. Concerning behavior goals, three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, indicated a little progress; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and nine support personnel, or 28.1%, indicated some progress; four teachers, or 12.5%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, indicated a lot of progress; and three teachers, or 9.4%, indicated not applicable. Regarding social and interpersonal goals, two teachers, or 6.3%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, indicated a little progress; six teachers, or 18.8%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, indicated some progress; six

teachers, or 18.8%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, indicated a lot of progress; and three teachers, or 9.4%, indicated not applicable. For self-advocacy goals, two teachers, or 6.3%, indicated a little progress; four teachers, or 12.5%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.3%, indicated some progress; 11 teachers, or 34.4%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, indicated a lot of progress; and one support personnel, or 3.1%, indicated not applicable.

The final transition planning goal question asked if participants believed the program prepared students to meet their goals. Four teachers, or 12.5%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, stated it somewhat prepared the students; 10 teachers, or 31.3%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.3%, stated it prepared them fairly well; and three teachers, or 9.4%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, stated it prepared the students very well.

Transition Planning Post High School Data Overview

The next series of transition related questions pertained to life after high school; this information can be found in Table 7. Participants were asked if they believed their students were prepared for life after high school. Fourteen teachers, or 43.8%, and 13 support personnel, or 40.6%, said they believed their students were ready, while three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, stated no or were unsure. Ten teachers, or 31.1%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, noted that their students had a plan for after high school; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and 10 support personnel, or 31.1%, noted there was no plan or were unsure if a plan existed.

When asked if the school encouraged its students with disabilities to continue learning after high school, 16 teachers, or 50.0%, and 14 support personnel, or 43.8%, stated yes; while only one teacher, or 3.1%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, said no.

The final question presented in Table 7 asked whether information about post high school services pertaining to the student's disability were provided to the family. Fourteen teachers, or 43.8%, and 12 support personnel, or 37.5%, indicated yes; three teachers, or 9.4%, and three support personnel, or 9.4%, said not yet or were unsure.

Table 7

Transition Planning Data Summary: Post High School

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q12a. Prepared for Life after HS						
Yes	14	43.8	13	40.6	27	84.4
No	2	6.3	0	0	2	6.3
Unsure	1	3.1	2	6.3	3	9.4
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q12b. Plan for after HS						
Yes	10	31.1	5	15.6	15	46.9
No	6	18.8	4	12.5	10	31.1
Unsure	1	3.1	6	18.8	7	21.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q12c. Encourages Continued Learning after HS						
Yes	16	50.0	14	43.8	30	93.8
No	1	3.1	1	3.1	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q19. Information About Post HS Services Provided						
Yes	14	43.8	12	37.5	26	81.3
Not Yet	2	6.3	0	0	2	6.3
Unsure	1	3.1	3	9.4	4	12.5
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Continuing Education Data Overview

Following the transition planning questions, participants were asked about continuing education programs for students with ID. The summary of this data can be found in Table 8. When asked whether they thought the students would be interested in attending a continuing education program designed for students with disabilities, nine teachers, or 28.1%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, indicated yes; six teachers, or 18.8%, and five support personnel, or 15.6%, indicated no; and two teachers, or 6.3%, and three support personnel, or 9.4%, were unsure. Half of the participants, or 50.0%, indicated that they believed their students would like to attend a continuing education program. This data is contradicted by the 75.0% of participants who selected some form of employment as the primary goal for their students. The responses to this question (Q13) can be found in Table 6 of the Transition Planning Data Overview Section. The responses to these two questions, Q12d and Q13, are noteworthy and will be used to aid in the development of recommendations for chapter five.

Concerning whether they knew of a continuing education program their students could attend, 12 teachers, or 37.5%, and 12 support personnel, or 37.5%, indicated yes; three teachers, or 9.4%, and three support personnel, or 9.4%, indicated no; and two teachers, or 6.3%, were unsure.

A series of Likert scale questions followed asking participants to select the level of importance different factors held. The factors included on the survey were cost, curriculum supports, behavior supports, physical health, safety, transportation, earning a certificate or degree, social opportunities, housing options, employment during or after the program, and closeness to home. Participants could select not at all important (1),

somewhat important (2), or very important (3). Regarding the general cost of attending a higher education program, one teacher, or 3.1%, and three support personnel, or 9.4%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and 16 teachers, or 50.0%, and 12 support personnel, or 37.5%, ranked the level of importance at very important. When asked about curriculum supports, four teachers, or 12.5%, ranked the level of importance at not important; three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and 10 teachers, or 31.1%, and 13 support personnel, or 40.6%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Concerning behavior supports, three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, ranked the level of importance at not important; eight teachers, or 25.0%, and six support personnel, or 18.8%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and six teachers, or 18.8%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Regarding physical health, eight teachers, or 25.0%, and three support personnel, or 9.4%, ranked the level of importance at not important; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and eight support personnel, or 25.0%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and two teachers, or 6.3%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, ranked the level of importance at very important. When asked about safety, four teachers, or 12.5%, ranked the level of importance at not important; six teachers, or 18.8%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and seven teachers, or 21.9%, and eight support personnel, or 25.0%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Concerning transportation, one support personnel, or 3.1%, ranked the level of importance at not important; five teachers, or 15.6%, and one support personnel, or 3.1%, ranked the level of importance at

somewhat important; and 12 teachers, or 37.5%, and 13 support personnel, or 40.6%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Regarding the earning of a certificate or degree, 12 teachers, or 37.5%, and six support personnel, or 18.8%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and five teachers, or 15.6%, and nine support personnel, or 28.1%, ranked the level of importance at very important. When presented with social opportunities, one teacher, or 3.1%, ranked the level of importance at not important, 11 teachers, or 34.4%, and eight support personnel, or 25.0%, ranked the level of importance somewhat important; and five teachers, or 15.6%, and seven support personnel, or 21.9%, ranked the level of importance at very important. When asked about housing options, three teachers, or 9.4%, ranked the level of importance at not important; seven teachers, or 21.9%, and nine support personnel, or 28.1%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and seven teachers, or 21.9%, and six support personnel, or 18.8%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Concerning employment, three teachers, or 9.4%, ranked the level of importance at not important; three teachers, or 9.4%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and 11 teachers, or 34.4%, and 11 support personnel, or 34.4%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Finally, for closeness to home, one teacher, or 3.1%, ranked the level of importance at not important; eight teachers, or 25.0%, and four support personnel, or 12.5%, ranked the level of importance at somewhat important; and eight teachers, or 25.0%, and 11 support personnel, or 34.4%, ranked the level of importance at very important. Further, the data results presented ranked cost as the most important factor when considering a continuing education program for students with disabilities, with 87.5%, of participants indicating it

was very important. Examining the least important factor, 34.4%, of participants ranked physical health as not at all important.

Table 8

Continuing Education Data Summary

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q12d. Student Interested in Continuing Education						
Yes	9	28.1	7	21.9	16	50.0
No	6	18.8	5	15.6	11	34.4
Unsure	2	6.3	3	9.4	5	15.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q12f. Know a Continuing Education Program						
Yes	12	37.5	12	37.5	24	75.0
No	3	9.4	3	9.4	6	18.8
Unsure	2	6.3	0	0	2	6.3
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24a. Factor Importance: Cost						
Somewhat	1	3.1	3	9.4	4	12.5
Very	16	50.0	12	37.5	28	87.5
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24b. Factor Importance: Curriculum Support						
Not	4	12.5	0	0	4	12.5
Somewhat	3	9.4	2	6.3	5	15.6
Very	10	31.1	13	40.6	23	71.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24c. Factor Importance: Behavior Supports						
Not	3	9.4	2	6.3	5	15.6
Somewhat	8	25.0	6	18.8	14	43.8
Very	6	18.8	7	21.9	13	40.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24d. Factor Importance: Physical Health						
Not	8	25.0	3	9.4	11	34.4
Somewhat	7	21.9	8	25.0	15	46.9
Very	2	6.3	4	12.5	6	18.8
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Table 8 (continued)

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Q24e. Factor Importance:						
Safety						
Not	4	12.5	0	0	4	12.5
Somewhat	6	18.8	7	21.9	13	40.6
Very	7	21.9	8	25.0	15	46.9
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24f. Factor Importance:						
Transportation						
Not	0	0	1	3.1	1	3.1
Somewhat	5	15.6	1	3.1	6	18.8
Very	12	37.5	13	40.6	25	78.1
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24g. Factor Importance:						
Certificate/Degree						
Somewhat	12	37.5	6	18.8	18	56.3
Very	5	15.6	9	28.1	14	43.8
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24h. Factor Importance:						
Social Opportunities						
Not	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
Somewhat	11	34.4	8	25.0	19	59.4
Very	5	15.6	7	21.9	12	37.5
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24i. Factor Importance:						
Housing Options						
Not	3	9.4	0	0	3	9.4
Somewhat	7	21.9	9	28.1	16	50.0
Very	7	21.9	6	18.8	13	40.6
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24j. Factor Importance:						
Employment						
Not	3	9.4	0	0	3	9.4
Somewhat	3	9.4	4	12.5	7	21.9
Very	11	34.4	11	34.4	22	68.8
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100
Q24k. Factor Importance:						
Closeness to Home						
Not	1	3.1	0	0	1	3.1
Somewhat	8	25.0	4	12.5	12	37.5
Very	8	25.0	11	34.4	19	59.4
% of Total	17	53.1	15	46.9	32	100

Data Analysis Overview

This research study sought to determine the perspectives and the perceptions, related to transition planning and continuing education, of teachers and support personnel. One population was included in this study. This group included the special education teachers and the special education support personnel (administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators) of high school students with ID from six local school districts within South Central Pennsylvania. The pool of participants was 80 school district personnel. A sample size calculator was used to determine the desirable sample size from the available population (SurveyMonkey, 2015). Based on a population of 80, a confidence level of 95%, and confidence interval of 10, a sample size of 44 participants would be required (SurveyMonkey, 2015). The actual sample size attained for this study was 32 participants. This equates to a confidence interval of 13.5, with a confidence level of 95%. Due to the low return rate, the results of this study cannot be considered statistically sound, but are able to provide information for the school districts involved.

The data were uploaded into SPSS to be analyzed. First, the survey questions were grouped together based on the type of question, dichotomous or Likert scale, and the topic of the question, transition planning or continuing education. Four sets of questions emerged from the survey. They include: (1) Transition Planning Process, (2) Transition Goals, (3) Continuing Education Knowledge, and (4) Continuing Education Factors. Statistical means were calculated within each set of questions and between the two groups, teachers and support personnel. These means were then used to compare the two groups within each set of questions using the Analysis of Variance, or ANOVA

(Ravid, 2011). The ANOVA shows findings as statistically significant based on a p value that is $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). The findings for each set of questions will be further discussed.

Transition Planning Process

Nine questions were deemed to pertain strictly to the transition planning process. These questions were dichotomous in nature and asked about the students' transition plans during high school and for the time immediately following high school. The answer choices for this set of questions were yes, no, or unsure; where unsure received a score of (0), no received a score of (1), and yes received a score of (2). These questions were first analyzed to isolate the means of the two groups for each question in the data set, the total mean of each question, and the mean for the total set of questions within the data. The specific questions for this set of data and the calculated means are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Transition Planning Process: Means

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Overall Mean	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q8. Has there been planning for transition to adult life for your students?	2.00	.000	2.00	.000	2.00	.000
Q9. For students with disabilities, does your students' school offer instruction that specifically focuses on transition planning?	1.71	.470	2.00	.000	1.84	.000

Table 9 (continued)

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Overall Mean	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q10. Do your students now spend any part of the school day in a vocation education or applied academics class?	1.88	.332	2.00	.000	1.94	.246
Q11. Do your students' transition plans or IEPs specifically state what course of study or kinds of classes the students should pursue in order to meet their post-school transition goals?	1.59	.712	1.47	.834	1.53	.761
Q12a. Has the education of your students prepared them for life after high school?	1.76	.562	1.73	.704	1.75	.622
Q12b. Do your students have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for the time immediately after they receive their high school diplomas?	1.53	.624	0.93	.884	1.25	.803
Q12c. Has school staff encouraged your students to continue learning after they receive their high school diplomas?	1.94	.243	1.93	.258	1.94	.246
Q12e. Do you think your students and their families understand the educational opportunities that are available after high school?	1.41	.712	1.27	.961	1.34	.827
Q19. Has information about services available after high school related to your students' kind of disabilities been provided to them by the school system?	1.76	.562	1.60	.828	1.69	.693
Mean of All Questions	1.73	-	1.66	-	1.69	-

After the means were calculated, a statistical comparison of the means was computed with the ANOVA test run simultaneously to determine if any of the questions resulted in statistical significance. In order for the results of the ANOVA to be statistically significant, the p value must be $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). Overall, the whole set did not have statistically significant findings, however, when this set of nine questions was analyzed using the ANOVA, two questions resulted in a statistically significant p value. These questions were:

- Q9. For students with disabilities, does your students' school offer instruction that specifically focuses on transition planning?
- Q12b. Do your students have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for the time immediately after they receive their high school diplomas?

Regarding question nine, the analysis resulted in a p value of .022, since this is $< .05$ the results from this question are statistically significant (Ravid, 2011). The results of this question indicate that teachers thought the school was less likely to offer instruction focused solely on transition planning, with five teachers, or 15.6%, stating that their students with disabilities did not receive instruction in transition planning. Alternatively, the support personnel fully believed transition planning instruction was included in the school program, with all 15 support personnel, or 46.9%, indicating that the students did receive instruction in transition planning.

Concerning question 12b, the analysis resulted in a p value of .034, since this is $< .05$ the results from this question are statistically significant (Ravid, 2011). The results of this question indicate that teachers believed their students' IEPs contained a plan for the time immediately following high school, with 10 teachers, or 31.1%, noting yes on this

question. The support personnel, however, were more likely to believe there was no plan in place or were unsure if a plan existed, with 10 support personnel, or 31.1%, selecting no or unsure. The results of the ANOVA analysis for questions nine and 12b can be found in Table 10.

Table 10

Transition Planning Process: ANOVA

Question	SS	df	MS	F	Significance (<i>p</i>)
Q9. Instruction in Transition Planning					
Between Groups	.689	1	.689	5.859	.022
Within Groups	3.529	30	118		
Total	4.219	31			
Q12b. Plan for after HS					
Between Groups	2.831	1	2.831	4.947	.034
Within Groups	17.169	30	.572		
Total	20.000	31			

Note. Significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Transition Goals

Two questions, one with seven sub-questions, were deemed to pertain strictly to transition goals. These questions were Likert scale type questions and asked about the students' progress on transition related IEP goals. The specific questions for this set and the calculated means are shown in Table 11. Regarding question 14, which included seven sub-questions, participants shared their perspectives on the progress students made on their transition related goals by selecting none (1), a little (2), some (3), a lot (4), or not applicable (0). These goals included leaving high school, vocational skills,

continuing education, independent living, behavior management, social and interpersonal, and self-advocacy.

Table 11

Transition Goals: Means

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Overall Mean	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q14a. Goals for how he/she wants to leave secondary school	3.18	1.015	3.33	.488	3.25	.803
Q14b. Vocationally oriented goals	3.24	.831	3.20	.676	3.22	.751
Q14c. Goals for continuing education	2.82	.833	3.00	.535	2.91	.734
Q14d. Independent living goals	3.29	.588	3.53	.640	3.41	.615
Q14e. Behavior management goals	2.53	1.375	3.13	.640	2.81	1.120
Q14f. Social/interpersonal goals	2.71	1.448	3.40	.632	3.03	1.177
Q14g. Self-advocacy	3.53	.717	3.07	.961	3.31	.859
Q15. Achieving Goals	2.94	.659	3.20	.561	3.06	.619
Mean of All Questions	3.03	-	3.23	-	3.13	-

Question 15 asked how well suited the school program was for achieving transition related goals. Participants shared their perspectives by selecting not at all well

suited (1), somewhat well suited (2), fairly well suited (3), or very well suited (4). These questions were first analyzed to isolate the means of the two groups for each question in the data set, the total mean of each question, and the mean for the total set of questions within the data.

After the means were calculated, a statistical comparison of the means was computed with the ANOVA test run simultaneously to determine if any of the questions resulted in statistical significance. In order for the results of the ANOVA to be statistically significant, the p value must be $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). Generally, the teachers and support personnel had the same opinions regarding the questions in this set. No overall statistical significance was found, and none of the individual questions in this set resulted in any statistical significance. Based on a review of the data, both participant groups indicated that they believed their students were making adequate progress on their transition related goals, with at least 75% of the total participants noting some or a lot of progress for each of the seven goal categories, and over 80% of the participants stating they thought the school program prepared the students to meet their transition goals fairly to very well.

Continuing Education Knowledge

Two questions were deemed to pertain strictly to the continuing education knowledge. These questions were dichotomous in nature and asked the participants if they believed their students' would be interested in enrolling in a continuing education program or if they knew of a continuing education program. The answer choices for this set of questions were yes, no, or unsure; where unsure received a score of (0), no received a score of (1), and yes received a score of (2). These questions were first analyzed to

isolate the means of the two groups for each question in the data set, the total mean of each question, and the mean for the total set of questions within the data. The specific questions for this set and the calculated means are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Continuing Education Knowledge: Means

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Overall Mean	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q12d. Do you think the students you serve would be interested in enrolling in a continuing education program after receiving their high school diploma?	1.41	.712	1.27	.799	1.34	.745
Q12f. Do you know of an inclusive continuing education program that students you serve can attend after receiving their high school diploma?	1.59	.712	1.80	.414	1.69	.592
Mean of All Questions	1.50	-	1.54	-	1.52	-

After the means were calculated, a statistical comparison of the means was computed with the ANOVA test run simultaneously to determine if any of the questions resulted in statistical significance. In order for the results of the ANOVA to be statistically significant, the *p* value must be < .05 (Ravid, 2011). There was no

statistically significant difference in this group of questions, nor was there any statistically significant difference found when each question was independently analyzed. Both teachers and support personnel appeared to have the same opinions regarding these two questions. Concerning whether they believed their students would like to attend a continuing education program, the participants were nearly equally divided, with nine teachers and seven support personnel, or 50.0% of the total participants, believing they would and the remaining eight teachers and eight support personnel, or 50.0% of the total participants, feeling unsure or believing the students would not like to attend a continuing education program. When asked if they were aware of an inclusive continuing education program that their students could attend 12 teachers and 12 support personnel, or 75% of the total participants said yes, they were aware of a program.

Continuing Education Factors

One question with 11 sub-questions was deemed to pertain strictly to continuing education factors. These questions were Likert scale type questions and asked about the importance of different factors related to attending a continuing education program. Regarding question 24, which included 11 sub-questions, participants shared their perspectives on the factors that affect attending a continuing education program for students with disabilities by selecting not at all important (1), somewhat important (2), or very important (3). These factors included cost, curriculum supports, behavior supports, physical health, safety, transportation, earning a certificate or degree, social opportunities, housing options, employment during or after completion, and closeness to home. These questions were first analyzed to isolate the means of the two groups for each question in the data set, the total mean of each question, and the mean for the total

set of questions within the data. The specific questions for this set and the calculated means are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

Continuing Education Factors: Means

Question	Teachers		Support Personnel		Overall Mean	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q24a. Cost	2.94	.243	2.80	.414	2.88	.336
Q24b. Curriculum Supports	2.35	.862	2.87	.352	2.59	.712
Q24c. Behavior Supports	2.18	.728	2.33	.724	2.25	.718
Q24d. Physical Health	1.65	.702	2.07	.704	1.84	.723
Q24e. Safety	2.18	.809	2.53	.516	2.34	.701
Q24f. Transportation	2.71	.470	2.80	.561	2.75	.508
Q24g. Certificate or Degree	2.29	.470	2.60	.507	2.44	.504
Q24h. Social Opportunities, Connections, & Friendships	2.24	.562	2.47	.516	2.34	.545
Q24i. Housing Options	2.24	.752	2.40	.507	2.31	.644
Q24j. Employment During or After Completion	2.47	.800	2.73	.458	2.59	.665
Q24k. Closeness to Home	2.41	.618	2.73	.458	2.56	.564
Mean of All Questions	2.33	-	2.58	-	2.45	-

After the means were calculated, a statistical comparison of the means was computed with the ANOVA test run simultaneously to determine if any of the questions

resulted in statistical significance. In order for the results of the ANOVA to be statistically significant, the p value must be $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). Overall, the whole set did not have statistically significant findings, however, when this set of eleven questions was analyzed using the ANOVA, one question resulted in a statistically significant p value. This was question 24b: Curriculum Supports. The results of the ANOVA analysis for question 24b can be found in Table 14.

Table 14

Continuing Education Factors: ANOVA

Question	SS	df	MS	F	Significance (p)
Q24b. Curriculum Supports					
Between Groups	2.103	1	2.103	4.634	.040
Within Groups	13.616	30	.454		
Total	15.719	31			

Note. Significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Regarding question 24b, the analysis resulted in a p value of .040, since this is $< .05$ the results from this question are statistically significant (Ravid, 2011). The results of this question indicate that teachers believed that curriculum supports were not as important compared to the opinions of the support personnel. Four teachers, or 12.5%, stated that curriculum supports were not at all important, compared to zero support personnel, or 0.0%, who selected this choice. Alternatively, the support personnel believed curriculum supports were a very important component of a continuing education program for students with disabilities, with 13, or 40.6%, indicating that this factor was

very important. This is higher than the 10 teachers, or 31.1%, who noted this factor as very important. Finally, three teachers, or 9.4%, and two support personnel, or 6.3%, selected somewhat important for the factor of curriculum supports.

Qualitative Findings

Following the survey data collection and analysis, two qualitative focus groups were conducted to gain further insight into the data results in order to better answer the research questions, following the explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2012). A pool of 32 individuals was used, including 17 teachers and 15 support personnel. Two focus groups were held, one for teachers and one for support personnel. This population of participants was comprised of those individuals who completed the online survey and agreed to participate in the follow-up focus groups. Three individuals gave their consent to participate in each of the two focus groups resulting in a total of six focus group participants. Participation remained voluntary throughout the process.

Focus Group Questions

Five discussion topics were selected from the survey tool to be included in the focus group tool. Three of the topics were the questions that came back with statistically significant differences between the two groups during the quantitative analysis. The remaining two discussion topics were selected due to the noteworthy results that were revealed during the quantitative analysis. The discussion topics were:

1. For students with disabilities, discuss your school's instruction that specifically focuses on transition planning.

2. Discuss the time immediately after your students receive their high school diploma and whether or not they have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for this time.
3. Discuss whether the education of your students has prepared them for life after high school, and if you think your students and their families understand the educational opportunities that are available after high school.
4. Discuss the importance of the curriculum support factor in meeting the needs of a student who may be attending a continuing education program.
5. Discuss the primary transition goal for students in your program and whether you think they would like to enroll in a continuing education program.

Teacher Focus Group Demographics

Three individuals agreed to participate in the teacher focus group. All three participants were female. Teacher participant 1 (TP1) worked for SD-2 for six years as the high school learning support English teacher. Overall, she has been working in special education for 21 years. Teacher participant 2 (TP2) worked for SD-1 for one and a half years as the high school autism teacher. Teacher participant 3 (TP3) worked for SD-6 for 20 years as the high school life skills teacher.

Teacher Focus Group Data

This focus group was conducted at a mutually agreed upon location and time with the researcher and the three teacher participants. The session lasted for approximately 90 minutes and was recorded using a laptop embedded audio recorder. The data was transcribed and analysis took place utilizing open, axial, and selective coding following the grounded theory design (Merriam, 2009). During the open and axial coding process

four thematic categories were identified, each with sub-themes for further exploration. These four themes include: 1) Student Characteristics, 2) Teachers, 3) College, and 4) Family. This was followed by selective coding which helped to reveal the overarching theme that emerged from the teacher focus group session. See Figure 4 for *Teacher Focus Group Coding Paradigm*, which includes the thematic categories, sub-themes, and the central theme.

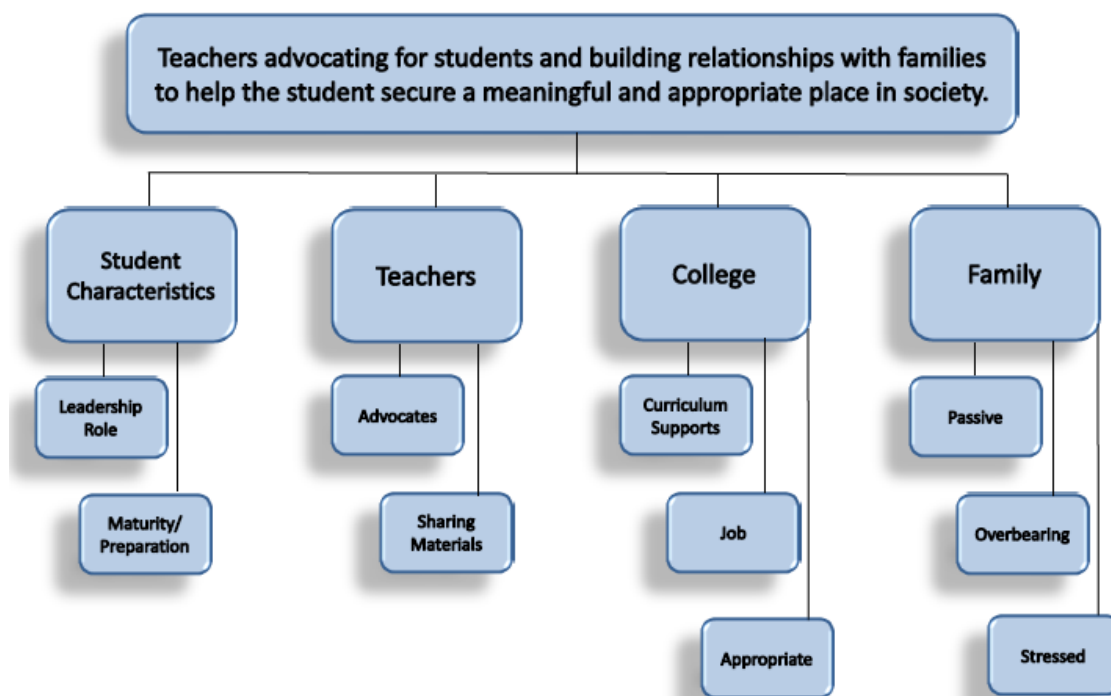


Figure 4. Teacher focus group coding paradigm.

Theme 1: Student Characteristics

Keywords: involved, understand, graduate, maturity, school, connection, skills, realistic, responsibility, independence. Each of the teacher participants was very open regarding their students' transition planning involvement, educational careers, and

transition from student to adult life. All of the participants noted the importance of having the student involved in developing his own transition plan. TP3 noted that “students are definitely involved in the process, even my lowest life skills student. I involve them so they understand the process of what it means.” She indicated that some students set unrealistic goals such as a student who “wanted to move to Australia. No job, no nothing, just move to Australia.” That is when teachers have to intervene, but for the most part, “the plans are driven 75% by the students.” TP1 noted the use of student interviews to make sure her students were fully involved in writing their transition goals. “Having conversations with students, we develop the IEP using that information. I interview the students as well.”

While the participants noted that the students’ transition involvement was crucial, they also indicated that sometimes the students have trouble seeing the big picture and only focus on getting out of high school with the rest of their peers. TP2 emphasized this point by stating that “many of my guys, they know that everybody else leaves at 18 and they want to be done.” TP1 echoed this lack of foresight by indicating that her students get stuck on one idea and only focus on “‘This is what I want to do. [...] So let me get out of school when I’m 18 so I can go do that.’ Not making a connection of all the other pieces that go along with it.” TP2 suggested “that it’s sometimes a maturity thing” with the students not being able to isolate the steps they need to take in order to reach their goal.

This fixation on a goal is an obstacle that these teachers indicated they have had to deal with on many occasions. TP2 had a student who knew he wanted “to be an artist. ‘But what about you makes you qualified to be an artist?’ ‘I’m good at drawing.’ ‘Okay

well give me some more.' I'm really trying to find what skills they have." TP1 stated, "It's that twist in thinking that sometimes we need to overcome [...] and sometimes we have to challenge that lack of realism." She went on to say:

We do have to try, but honestly sometimes, it's letting them have that opportunity to try something. Why not give it a shot and see if you do have a talent, see if you are interested when you're actually put on the spot and have to do the job.

A push for student independence and responsibility was noted as important for student success in achieving their goals by all participants. TP2 stated, "We've given them everything they need to be successful but there needs to be that switch over during high school, and maybe it's between the 10th and 11th grade year, where the kids really start doing for themselves." TP3 suggested that the students needed to be doing the work "on their own without as many supports." TP1 went on to say that it is important to make the parents understand that "it is going to be your child's responsibility" when they step out into the world after high school.

Theme 2: Teachers

Key words: experience, surveys and inventories, exposing, interests, honest, advocate, support, information, share. The role of the teacher was a theme that emerged with two sub-themes; teachers as advocates and teachers sharing materials with colleagues. The teacher advocate has to support the family, but her focus is ensuring the student's voice is heard. TP3 stated, "I really try hard to work in 'What do you want to do?' and then we need to jump on board" with that idea to support the student's goals. She noted that "we do surveys and inventories to find out their strengths, their weaknesses, their interests, even just daily living skills." TP1 agreed by saying "it's the

skill of the teacher to say, hey, let's find out what she wants and then try to give the child the opportunity to talk.” She also said that she has her students complete “transition term papers. [...] I have them identify some ideas of what they might want to do, how would they go about getting there, and that is a research project for them.” She stressed the importance of making the student take ownership of his goals. “I think exposing them and telling them ‘This is what you need, this is the mindset that I want you to learn.’ I think having that discussion on a regular basis with them is huge.” She noted her methods were a way of “trying to take a look at the whole child” so nothing is missed.

TP2 also used writing to elicit her students’ interests and goals after completing the RIASEC transition assessment stating they “write a paragraph about [...] what does it mean to have your scores, [...] what sort of things are you interested in, what skills do you have.” The participants noted that these writing exercises, discussions with their students, and inventories and assessments could also bring to light some unrealistic student goals, which lead to deeper discussions. TP1 noted that when her students’ goals seem to be impractical she asks them “‘Are you being realistic?’ [...] ‘What is something you like to do as a hobby, something you enjoy, [...] or something that will put food on the table?’ [...] Honestly, sometimes it's letting them have that opportunity to try something.” Please see Appendix F for a list of the inventories and assessments used by the participants and Appendix G for a sample of a teacher made inventory.

All three participants fully agreed that their role as the student’s advocate was a top priority, TP1 going so far as to say, “I am the child’s advocate in all of this and I try to make their dreams happen.” However, the participants also noted the importance of being there for the student’s parents and family. TP1 noted, “We need to look at where

are the parents coming from? What level of support do they need to make this happen?"

TP2 said "We offer workshops through the special ed. department after school for parents to attend [...] we have flyers and pamphlets." The participants noted that the parents are stressed and overwhelmed. TP1 indicated that:

I think being flexible is, and our availability, is huge. I meet with people over the summer. I meet with parents after work. I do phone conferences. I have done home visits. [...] I think we need to be more proactive and stepping up to meet their needs.

In order to meet these needs, TP2 suggested "making time to set up a meeting once or twice a year just to talk about transition" could help with the level of parent confusion. TP3 noted that honesty and information were crucial when preparing parents. "I try to paint a very realistic picture for them [...] but I wish I could figure out a better way to prepare them for the shift, [...] but I just keep on giving parents information." One suggestion she did have to help bridge the transition awareness gap was to invite parents of graduated students "back for like a transition night, like a panel discussion almost, like hey, this is what I found, and the parents are going to be brutally honest with the parents to give them an eye-opener." She also suggested that in order to get the families to attend, offer:

Free food! Offer them food. I have parents that don't come to a single IEP meeting, so the idea that I want you to come on your own, on Tuesday at 6 o'clock at night, [...] but if you offer a free meal everybody comes out of the woodwork, [...] and offer them child care.

The participants agreed that while they believe the parents feel overwhelmed with the transition process, they also feel as though sometimes they themselves are not adequately informed with the information. TP1 stated that “there's a lot that the guidance department knows about that they don't share with us. I mean, I just heard about ResCare for the first time last year.” TP2 echoed this idea noting, “It's nice because we have a transition coordinator who is a wealth of knowledge and has a bunch of resources, and then she'll say, ‘Oh, go talk to the counselor she has something else.’” TP1 followed up with:

I think there's almost too many options for us and I need it, and I have to go to different files and go to see different people to get this, and I wish I had a book, a manual that says you know here you go. [...] Sometimes with this transition piece, some things can be missed and you don't want that to happen.

Apart from resources, TP2 indicated that there are other classes in the building that teach similar skills, but they do not collaborate because it is a regular education program. “They talk about careers, and they do mock interviews, and there's another section of the class where they can actually go out to work for part of the day.” She continued to discuss how these transition programs exist in isolation and do not collaborate with one another. “I feel that our transition program and that regular ed. transition program don't really work together and I think it's just because they've grown out of two different places.” She thinks “if we put those two heads together we could probably really benefit from each other.” TP1 agreed that it is important to bridge resources and classes together so the students can reap the benefits of a collaborative

program; “We need a bigger umbrella. We need to have regular ed. and special ed. conversations together and be on the same page.”

Theme 3: College

Keywords: curriculum supports, SDIs, job, skills, appropriate. Focus group questions four and five focused on continuing education for students with disabilities. When asked to elaborate on curriculum supports for higher education the participants had some differences in the way they approached the topic. TP1 believed that curriculum supports meant “anything that is designed to meet the needs of the kids,” being “allowed to change the curriculum.” TP2 stated, it’s the “things that we’re giving them that will help them be successful with the curriculum, kind of like the SDIs (specially designed instruction). [...] What do we give our kids to support the curriculum? How are we supporting the teachers?” TP3 noted, “I think of SDIs, that’s what I think of when I think of the curriculum supporting the goals.”

The teacher participants all agreed that the main goal of continuing education was to secure some type of employment. TP2 stated, “I think it makes sense that we make sure they have the skills to get and keep a job.” She also noted that employment should even occur during college enrollment; “I also tell the kids even in college you have a job or most people have a job.”

The participants indicated that higher education may not be appropriate for these students. They believed that since the end result would be a job either way, that it may make more sense to identify and develop the student’s skill set during high school so he would be prepared to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. TP1 emphasized this idea, “I can see where this is good, the education piece is important, but the reality

piece is these kids also need to have these work skills and sometimes the only way to get them is going out to work.” TP3 noted, “It’s good for them to already be working four days a week, to know where they’re going.” It can often be difficult to turn the parents away from continuing education if they have their hearts set on it for their child, even if it may not be appropriate for the student. TP3 noted that it’s a struggle when that’s “what Mom and Dad want but I don’t know how that’s going to happen.” She also recalled a previous student’s family who took the higher education route with their child and had a negative experience. “I happened to see Dad out and about and he looked at me and he said, ‘My house is falling apart. We should have listened to you.’”

Theme 4: Family

Keywords: overbearing, passive, functioning level, stressed, learning, job, knowledge, realistic, accepting. According to the teacher participants, parents can take on two different roles, the passive parent and the overbearing parent. TP1 supports this statement indicating that she has parents who simply “want their kids to get through school and they’re not real concerned about whether they ever leave the home to get a job of some type.” She continued to explain how “parents at the other extreme are so overly involved that they’re calling the shots for the child’s transition.” Regarding the passive parents, TP2 noted that “I don’t know that they’re necessarily doing any research ahead of time, I think they’re just sort of learning as they go.” She also indicated that “parents at the high school level don’t necessarily want to come in” for meetings and information sessions. TP3 stated that:

If they don’t have a coordinator from the county, I get on them pretty hard that they need to do this, and I start telling the parent you need to advocate for your

child, you are going to be the one that has to provide, you're going to have to be the support coordinator, if you don't have one you're going to have to do this. I don't think they understand.

She also indicated that things have changed over the years, “I don't have parents that are go getters that are saying, ‘Yes, I want this for my child, let's do this.’”

Another common factor the teachers identified with their passive parents was the level of functioning within the family. TP3 stated, “I deal with a lot of lower functioning parents, so I don't know if they have the parenting skills to know [...] ‘I should educate myself on this, what is this transition?’” TP2 agreed with this, noting they need to consider “the intellectual abilities of the families that are supporting these students, because sometimes they’re a product of where they come from.”

On the opposite end of the parent spectrum “you do get that overbearing parent that drives the plan” according to TP3. TP1 noted that the student could rarely find success with this type of parent, “if the child is not interested or if they're just trying to make mom happy to get her off his back [...] it's not going to happen.” She suggested one way to cope with these parents is to have the parents “become more realistic and accepting of their child’s disability. Often our parents are not accepting of the disability their child has. They lived with it, but they don't accept it. They want their child to be something else.” The participants indicated that unless the family learns to accept the student and his disability, making a successful transition would be a struggle. TP1 stated that “getting parents to understand that their kids are not struggling or failing because it’s fun, they're doing it because we’re asking them to do something that they don’t have the skills for.”

While the students may be struggling in school, the participants agreed that the parents are struggling with understanding the high school transition process and the huge step to adult life for a student with disabilities. TP1 summed it up by stating, “We have a lot of parents who are stressed.” She went on to say, “They don't have time to make these phone calls and you know it's hard to play phone tag with people.” TP2 agreed that becoming a parent advocate is like taking on a job, “When they leave our school, it's their family's responsibility to be making the phone calls, and setting up the appointments. [...] They need to see how that becomes a job in itself.” TP3 also supported this claim, noting:

I have parents call me all the time, at least twice a month, different ones that say “Okay, what do I need to do for this?” [...] They didn't understand and then come back and say, “Wow, I had no idea the stuff that the school did. You told us this, but we didn't think it was going to be as bad as what you said it was going to be.” [...] “I wish I would have listened to you.”

Support Personnel Focus Group Demographics

Three individuals agreed to participate in the support personnel focus group. All three participants were female. Support personnel participant 1 (SPP1) worked for SD-4 for 15 years as the district psychologist. Support personnel participant 2 (SPP2) worked for SD-1 for 13 years as the district psychologist. Support personnel participant 3 (SPP3) worked for SD-3 for 14 years as the transition coordinator.

Support Personnel Focus Group Data

This focus group was conducted at a mutually agreed upon location and time with the researcher and the three support personnel participants. The session lasted for

approximately 90 minutes and was recorded using a laptop embedded audio recorder. The data was transcribed and analysis took place utilizing open, axial, and selective coding following the grounded theory design (Merriam, 2009). During the open and axial coding process four thematic categories were identified, each with sub-themes for further exploration. These four themes include: 1) Student Preparation, 2) Schools, 3) Family, and 4) Finances. This was followed by selective coding which helped to reveal the overarching theme that emerged from the support personnel focus group session. See Figure 5 for the *Support Personnel Focus Group Coding Paradigm*, which includes the thematic categories, sub-themes, and the central theme.

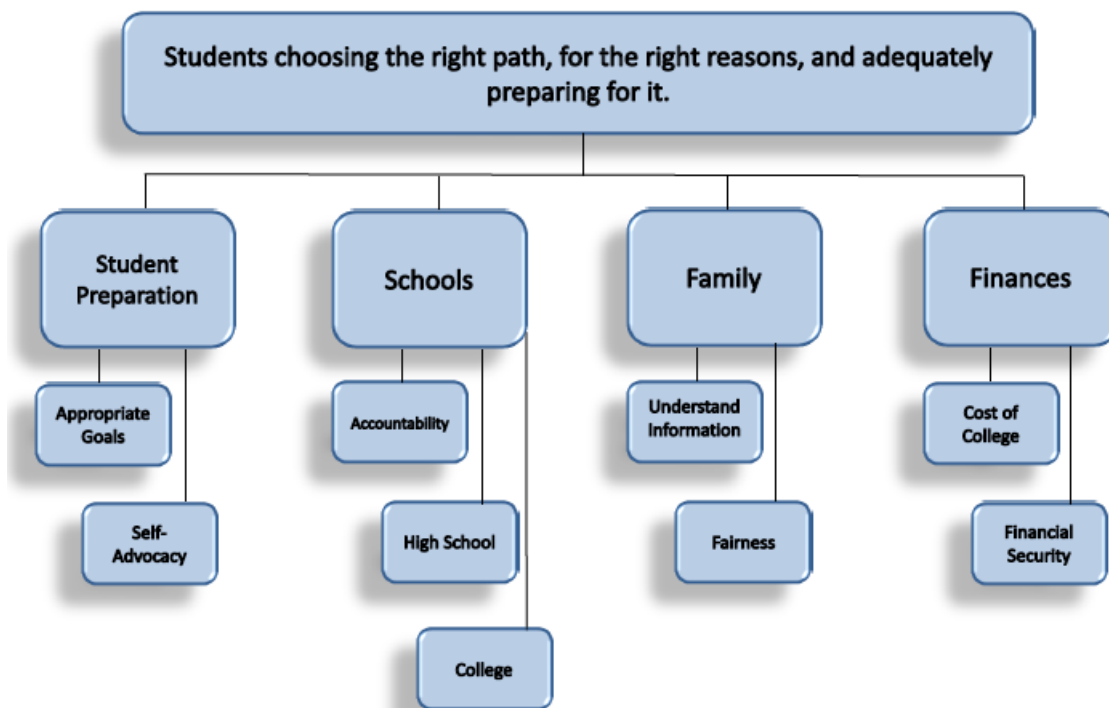


Figure 5. Support personnel focus group coding paradigm.

Theme 1: Student Preparation

Keywords: support, involved, appropriate, prepared, self-advocacy, embarrassment, organization. The support personnel participants were very clear in their desire to see a well-prepared student transitioning from high school to adulthood. SPP3 suggested that “as they get older we want to make sure the student is more involved each year as they progress.” SPP2 added that at the high school level they really start looking at “what we need to do to really help prepare these kids and also make sure their goals are appropriate for them.” SPP3 agreed and suggested that high schools start looking at their curriculum and ask, “Why are we still reading fictional third grade stories and asking them comprehension questions?” She continued by reinforcing that what these students need in order to be prepared for the world is a “transition to adult life program. So practical skills, go out to the community, where everything we do inside the classroom is vocationally based or it's social skills, [...] the reading comp. is we're going to read a recipe.” SPP1 noted that it is important for them to also be able “to fill out a job form or an application.” SPP2 supported the inclusion of these skills by adding:

We want the person to be able to measure up to one fourth, one eighth, three quarters. It's very specific goals related to the field or fields, like if they decide they want to do construction. [...] What are their IEP goals that address what they need? [...] It's about their choices and their career choices and they can change their mind, as long as they have these basic skills.

A well-prepared student also needs to be knowledgeable regarding his own limitations. SPP3 noted that when speaking to some students regarding their disabilities they respond “‘I don't have a disability.’ [...] ‘We’ve been having IEP meetings for you

for the last 10 years.’ We clearly tell them, ‘You all have a diagnosis, have a disability, that is why you are here.’” SPP2 believed that this unawareness of their own disabilities is actually unacceptance and embarrassment, “Some of these kids they don't like that disability category. It's because school's been hard for them, it's been really difficult for them, it's embarrassing, it's a stigma.” She continued to explain, “We have kids at the high school who really need the support, and they won't go to the resource teacher, and they won't go to that learning support teacher to get that additional help. [...] It connects to self-advocacy.”

Theme 2: Schools

Keywords: high school, college, accountability, teachers, goals, presentations, educate, information, agencies, highly-qualified. The second theme that emerged within the support personnel focus group was schools. This theme had three sub-themes: accountability, high school, and college. Regarding accountability, SPP3 found that Vo-Tech teachers “are wonderful, but they are sometimes not educators. They are coming in from their career field and they don't write in educational terms.” This can be a problem when they are working with students with disabilities who require IEPs. SPP2 noted that she worked with “somebody who was an eighth grade teacher who had no idea that he had to do a transition goal for his students.” SPP3 commented that she “did transition presentations, just small groups of teachers who have to write transition plans” so they were aware of what a transition plan was and what it required. SPP2 also noted that she spent a great deal of time working with staff and educating them on the need to connect parents and families with MH/IDD (Mental Health/Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities). She expressed that the staff “had no idea they needed a case manager

coming to the meetings.” Further, regarding college staff, when these students enroll in a continuing education program, all the participants had concerns with the qualifications of the staff, whether they were highly qualified and whether they could handle the needs of students with disabilities. SPP3 stated, “Are their staff even trained to make this happen?”

Before a student enters college, he must first successfully leave high school. In order to do that SPP3 noted that they have the teacher “start shooting for long-term, ‘Where do you want to be after high school?’ and then working backwards to make sure that you’re taking the courses that you need to be taking to meet those goals.” In order to help the student make those long-term decisions, the team must educate the student on the available options and determine the student’s interests and skill set. SPP3 indicated, “We give them vocational training and job coaching, we bring in the agencies and try to get them some other assessments. [...] Having those informational evenings” for both the student and the parents to help prepare them for making tough decisions. The participants also noted it’s important to make sure families are aware of how to link up with different agencies such as CPARK (The Arc of Cumberland & Perry Counties), MH/IDD, and the Social Security Office. SPP2 noted that the bottom line for high school support was “if somebody has the potential and the skills to do that, to meet a certain goal, we should do what we can to help them reach it.”

The participants all agreed that before a student with disabilities makes the decision to enroll in a continuing education program, it is important for him to understand the significant shift in the supports he received between high school and college. SPP1 indicated that “I think the first thing they need is someone to help them navigate the

system, like the office of disabilities.” She continued by saying, “There is an office of disabilities and you've got a person assigned to you [...] and that person can function both as a tutor, as an advisor, [...] any of the kinds of things” the student may need to be successful. The participants agreed upon the fact that even if the student links up with a support person, it doesn't guarantee the student a safe or successful experience. SPP2 indicated that “really good people get into really bad situations.” SPP3 commented on how a technical institute in South-Western Pennsylvania has a serious problem with their female students “getting pregnant because there's no supervision. Teachers go home at the end of the day and there's no supervision in the dorm rooms.” The participants understood the desire to continue one's education and were all supportive of a “transition program for 18-25, something else so it's not like a sheltered workshop,” a place where the students could receive a college experience without the safety and financial concerns that come along with it.

Theme 3: Family

Keywords: knowledge, understanding, responsibility, support, future vs. present, job, confused, fairness. The participants believed that families were lacking a general understanding of the transition process and the services the high school provided. SPP3 noted that she says to families, “‘Okay, but Johnny's ready, he's 19, and we've serviced him, and he has a job, and he doesn't need us.’ ‘Oh no, he's staying until he's 21.’ You have those other parents where they're like 18 and he's done,” even though “he doesn't have these skills, they're like ‘No, he's done.’” There was also a general acceptance that no matter how often transition is discussed the parents and families do not develop an understanding of the process. SPP3 noted:

Even though we talked about it at every single IEP meeting [...] and even on the phone and in emails, the students and the parents still will say, “I didn't know anything. You never told me anything. You never talked about that.” And we can't figure out why, because we have those conversations.

SPP1 believed on some level that it was the parents saying “I'm not accepting responsibility for this problem.”

SPP3 believed the parents were not grasping the entire picture, but were only focusing on the here and now of the problem, “It's so hard to get parents to focus on the future because they're worried that Johnny's failing science right now.” They also found it difficult to get parents to accept the problem as the disability. SPP2 noted that “sometimes parents don't even use that disability category.” SPP3 also agreed by stating “It's that stigma with it.” SPP2 indicated that things get more complicated when dealing with families when the parents come in stating, “Does it really matter? This is what they're going to do, they know how to do it already, and [...] they're going to take over our farm.”

While the parents may not want to face the future with their child still in high school, after the student graduates parents are overwhelmed with the burden of becoming their child's case manager. SPP2 noted, “People come back and say, ‘I wasn't prepared for this.’ [...] ‘What am I going to do with them now?’ [...] ‘Where are they going to go?’” All of the participants agreed that providing more frequent informational sessions was important, even if participation from the families had been low.

For those parents who do advocate for their child and push for the child to go into some form of higher education, the participants had mixed reactions. SPP1 believed that

unless the program specifically focuses on a vocational component, it is not a valuable resource for parents to pursue. SPP3 pointed out that “the parents who want this don't think that.” She went on to say that these parents want this for their child “because they're being educated with their same age, non-disabled peers. [...] They're having a college experience with their [...] peers.” SPP3 also indicated that this is an up and coming trend she has been seeing with some parents and she has made her “supervisor and the director of special ed. well aware that these requests to start going to college, that they're going to be coming in while they're still in high school.” When SPP2 asked what it was these parents were truly seeking, SPP3 indicated “fairness.”

Theme 4: Finances

Keywords: job, career, money, expensive. The final support personnel theme concerned finances. The participants all agreed that the cost of sending a student to college is very expensive. SPP2 noted that she thinks, “It's a financial burden. [...] There's a lot of money invested in that. Some people say, ‘OK, if you fail you fail that's it.’ But others ‘If you fail, you just cost us, the family, 25, 30, \$40,000.’” SPP1 indicated that to go to college just to have the experience is “a waste of your money.” SPP3 stated that some families “are paying \$20,000 a year for this experience. So if you have the money and you want your child to go and have a college experience, then more power to you.” She also noted that there is financial aid available for these students since the families have not been saving for college. SPP1 was not “okay with it if it's at public expense. I'm not okay with it if it increases the tuition for everyone else, and that's my issue.”

Another issue that SPP1 had was the belief that the colleges were doing this just to make more money. SPP3 agreed, noting:

I have said that too, they're not filling up their dorm rooms they're begging for people. [...] I think most people in education feel the same way when you look at colleges, are you taking advantage of that situation? However, they're not telling the parents that. This is what they're saying to the parents, because I've heard them talk to the parents, "Why have we forgotten you for so long, this population? We should have been serving you a long time ago."

SPP1 supported this statement and expressed concern for families being taken advantage of in the future, "I'd like to see what happens when you take \$80,000 of a family's money [...] and the kid comes out with no more skills because they weren't capable of the things that colleges were supposed to teach."

SPP1 brought the expense of college back to the concept of employability and sending students to college "with the expectation [...] that they will be able to find a niche in employment, support themselves. If we are honest [...] we have to [...] have them work towards something that will get them a job." SPP3 supported this stance by commenting, "A job that's going to pay for them to get a decent house, a decent car, contributing to their society." SPP2 concluded the focus group by stating, "It's a tough decision" that parents have to make.

Focus Group Data Frequencies

After the focus group data was coded and themes were developed for the paradigms, the frequency of each theme and code that emerged was tallied to present the

data in a graphical representation. Table 15 illustrates the number of times the theme or code was mentioned by the participants during the focus group sessions.

Table 15

Analytical Frequency of Occurring Themes in Focus Group Data

Themes and Codes	Teachers (N=)	Support Personnel (N=)
Student		
Leadership	12	15
Role/Self-Advocacy		
Maturity/Preparation	17	
Appropriate Goals		17
Teachers		
Advocates	32	
Sharing Materials	13	
Schools		
Accountability		15
High School		9
College		
Curriculum Supports	5	12
Job	3	
Appropriate	4	
Family		
Passive	10	
Overbearing	11	
Stressed/Understand Information	8	12
Fairness		9
Finances		
Cost of College		21
Financial Security		14

Note. N = frequency count, the number of times the theme or code was mentioned by the participants.

Further, the table highlights the codes and themes that were shared by both groups (purple shading), and the codes and themes that differed between the teacher and support personnel groups (blue shading and pink shading respectively). The similarities and differences between the focus group data will be explained in narrative detail following the table.

Focus Group Similarities

The analysis of the two sets of focus group data revealed several common themes and sub-themes, as well as some differences between the two groups. Among the common themes were students and family. The common sub-themes included college appropriateness and curriculum supports. Examining the theme of students, the teachers saw their students guiding their own transition plans and developing their own goals for the future. The support personnel agreed with this and wanted to ensure that the students were developing appropriate goals that targeted specific skills they would need. The teachers also believed that sometimes their students needed to mature and develop more responsibility. This ran parallel with the support personnel who believed the students needed to develop their self-advocacy skills.

Concerning the theme of family, both groups shared a similar mindset that parents were overwhelmed and lacked knowledge about the high school transition process. Likewise, both groups were adamant that the information was being shared with the parents and families; however, they could not isolate a specific factor that prevented the families from retaining and applying the information that was being shared. Three similar ideas were expressed within both groups: 1) the level of functioning within the family, 2) not attending IEP and transition meetings or presentations, and 3) stress and

general confusion concerning the topics. Despite these factors, and poor attendance at meetings and presentations, both groups believed that continuing to reach out to the parents and offer training sessions were important factors to keep in place.

Two sub-themes, college appropriateness and curriculum supports, were discussed in both focus groups. Focusing on college appropriateness, both groups believed that if the student was equipped with the skills to attend college, higher education should be a consideration. However, both groups also believed that enrolling in a higher education program would defer the student from immediately finding a job that would promote independence and societal security. Further, these groups also believed that higher education was often the goal of the parent and not what the student truly wanted to pursue.

Finally, curriculum supports were discussed at both sessions and believed by both groups to be essential for a student finding success within a higher education program. For the teacher group this was anything that would help meet the needs of the student. The support personnel group had a similar view by focusing on a specific support person who could essentially be anything the student would need from campus navigator to academic tutor.

Focus Group Differences

The analysis of the two sets of focus group data revealed several different themes. The teacher focus group developed the isolated themes of teachers and college. The overall tone of the teacher focus group themes was that of advocacy and support. The participants indicated that their job was to make sure the student's voice was heard during transition meetings and that the student be given the opportunity to try new things before

dismissing them as unachievable. This included the consideration of higher education. The teacher focus group also did not limit the term higher education to mean just college; instead TP1 deduced that “higher education does not necessarily mean college. Is it Career Tech? Is it going to anything else, a two-year school? Is it a cooking school? Is it barber school?” This point of view made the group more open to the consideration of higher education for students with disabilities.

The support personnel group developed the isolated themes of schools and finances. The overall tone of the support personnel focus group themes was that of accountability and appropriateness. The participants indicated that they wanted their high schools to develop students who were ready to enter the work force upon graduation. That entailed making sure staff were knowledgeable on the purpose and process of the transition plan and that meaningful and useful skills were taught in the classroom. The support personnel focus group also had concerns with the cost of college and whether that money was being spent wisely by admitting students with disabilities into college. They would rather see these students employed at a job, earning a steady income and making contributions to society.

Results and Interpretations

The goal of this research was to bring attention to the areas of transition planning and continuing education for students with Intellectual Disabilities. This mixed methods study included online surveys and focus groups for the teachers and support personnel of high school students with ID to obtain an understanding of the perceptions and opinions regarding the transition planning process and continuing education for these students. The data collected throughout this study will be used to reinforce a continued trend in the

world of special education; that teacher and support personnel populations remain unaware of crucial information regarding the transition planning process and their student's lives post high school. Detailed information will be given to provide answers to research questions (1) and (2).

Research Question One

Regarding research question (1):

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?

In order for the results of the survey questions to be significant, the significance level or p value has to be $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). Based on the data presented in Table 10, the ANOVA data results indicated that there were two survey questions that offered statistically significant results to aid in answering research question one. These questions were found within the transition planning process data set and were related to post-secondary plan development and instruction in transition planning. Additional data was collected concerning these areas through two focus groups. The areas of student preparation and student and family awareness of opportunities were also included within the focus group data.

The data presented in the findings section of chapter four supports the literature that was used to lay a foundation for this research study concerning post-secondary transition plan development. According to Benito (2012), the majority of educators stated that the students' educational career had not adequately prepared them for a seamless transition into life after high school, even though the majority of educators

noted that these students did have IEPs that included individualized transition plans. This study showed that 10 participants, or 31.1%, believed the students they served had not developed a plan for the time immediately after high school, and another seven participants, or 21.9%, were unsure of the existence of post high school plans. Within the focus groups, SPP2 noted the importance of developing a well-rounded student, there needs to be “an academic focus, but it doesn't just have to be these random goals like reading fluency, reading comprehension; we can't forget about the whole real world stuff.”

In an open-ended response question on the survey which asked participants to share their thoughts on the topic of transition planning, one participant went so far as to say: “I want all of these students to experience happy and successful lives.” Another responded with: “we hope they can be productive adults.” While wants and hopes are nice sentiments, the fact remains that the level of preparation, awareness, and knowledge, concerning transition planning and post-secondary life, for the IEP and transition planning teams lies in the hands of the educators who work with these students day in and day out, and they don't always have all the information. TP1 indicated that “there's a lot that the guidance department knows about that they don't share with us. [...] With this transition piece some things can be missed and you don't want that to happen.” It is not nearly enough to hope for success, success must be achieved through unyielding work and effort from every member of the team.

With regards to instruction in transition planning, the literature suggests that a positive predictor of post-secondary outcomes and a best practice in transition activities is participation in life skills and social skills instruction (Papay & Bambara, 2014). These

skills can help prepare students for the higher amount of inclusion and level of independence they will experience when transitioning to a higher education environment. During the support personnel focus group session, SPP3 indicated that her district was focusing on an adult life program, where the students would learn by going “out to the community, where everything we do inside the classroom is vocationally based or it’s social skills.” However, according to the survey data collected in this study, there were different views on the level of transition instruction students received. While the majority of participants, 27, or 84.4%, did state that their students received instruction in transition planning, five teachers, or 15.6%, stated that no instruction had taken place. If the students are not able to understand the purpose of the transition plan and the skills needed to be successful in post-secondary life, it is unrealistic to expect them to seamlessly transition from a world of supports to one where independence is crucial, let alone to take a leadership role in the planning of that future at IEP and transition meetings. The focus group data supported this by indicating that the students still have some maturing to do in order to fully understand the purpose of a transition plan and to select appropriate and achievable goals. TP1 noted that “sometimes we have to challenge that lack of realism” in order to steer them toward a successful path.

Papay and Bambara (2014) conducted an analysis of the NLTS2 data to determine best practices in transition planning. According to the authors, student participation in transition planning played a key role in student success after high school (Papay & Bambara, 2014). The data indicates that students who were involved with their own transition planning were three times more likely to participate in some form of higher education, were five times more likely to be employed, and three times more likely to

engage in socialization (Papay & Bambara, 2014). While the results to survey question 17, which asked about the students' role in their transition planning, offered no statistical significance, the results do show the overall level of participation from the students. Five participants, or 15.6%, stated that the student was present for meetings but offered little or no input. The majority of participants, 25, or 78.1%, believed their students provided some input at transition planning meetings, but were far from leading the discussion about their futures. Only two participants, or 6.3%, believed the students took a leadership role in the transition planning process. The teacher focus group data seems to differ significantly with the survey responses. All teacher participants indicated that their students were very involved in developing their transition plans, TP3 going so far as to say "the plans are driven 75% by the students." While the focus group was a small sample, it is interesting that all expressed high levels of participation from their students when only one teacher participant on the survey noted the students taking a leadership role. The culminating fact that emerges is that it is important to engage these students in the discussion about their futures, to mold them into active participants in the planning, and to make sure they acquire a general understanding of the process itself.

A review of the data shows that these participants believed they were providing vast and varied educational experiences and information to their students and their families, with 84.4% of participants believing the education provided to the students would prepare them for life after high school. This was supported by data from both focus groups, which indicated that information was constantly being issued to the parents and families through IEP and transition meetings, informational presentations, and pamphlets and flyers. However, this data was contradicted with the staggering 53.1% of

participants who indicated that either their students did not have an IEP that included an individualized plan for the time immediately after graduation, or were unsure if such plans existed. The problem, therefore, is not in the types of services and information provided, but in the method in which it is disseminated. SPP3 supported this fault in the delivery system; “Even though we talked about it at every single IEP meeting [...] the students and the parents still will say [...] ‘You never talked about that.’ And we can't figure out why because we have those conversations.” Chapter five will explore possible recommendations to this newly identified problem.

Research Question Two

Regarding research question (2):

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

In order for the results of the survey questions to be noteworthy, the significance level or p value has to be $< .05$ (Ravid, 2011). Based on the data presented in Table 14, the ANOVA data results indicated that there was one survey question that offered statistically significant results to aid in answering research question two. This question was found within the continuing education factors data set and was related to curriculum supports offered at continuing education programs. Additional data was collected concerning this area through two focus groups. The areas of primary transition goals and enrolling in continuing education were also included within the focus group data.

The data presented in the findings section of chapter four supports the literature that was used to lay a foundation for this research study pertaining to students with

disabilities attending higher education programs. According to Benito's (2012) study, curriculum accommodations were listed among the top components of a continuing education program for students with disabilities. While this component did score high within this study, it was the only factor to come back with statistically significant differences between the two groups. It was expected that teachers would place a higher value on the importance of curriculum supports; however, it was actually the support personnel who found this factor of higher importance. Thirteen of the 15 support personnel ranked this factor as very important, with the remaining two ranking it at somewhat important. This was the highest ranked factor among the support personnel. Many teachers believed this factor was not of crucial importance, with four of the 17 teachers ranking it at not at all important, placing their highest value in the cost of the program. One of the teachers in the focus group session explained why teachers may have passed over curriculum supports as extremely important, noting that she could see that it "might get a lower ranking because in college, more than the teacher catering to what the kid needs, it's that shift that the kid needs to start figuring out how they can make whatever that teacher gave them work." The others agreed, indicating that the students they would send to continuing education programs would be the students who are prepared to advocate for themselves and follow the curriculum "probably on their own without as many supports" as noted by TP3.

Concerning the remaining factors that contribute to a student with disabilities attending a PSE program, the literature notes that the majority of educators "cited inclusive, individualized PSE opportunities geared toward students' interests and strengths, with curriculum accommodations and individualized supports" (Benito, 2012,

p. 3). The data results in this study placed cost, curriculum supports, transportation, and employment during or after the program as the highest among participants, with $\geq 68.8\%$ of participants indicating these factors were very important. During the two focus group sessions, all participants believed strongly about the students becoming employed, whether this was right out of high school or after attending a PSE program. TP1 noted, “If I can see them being gainfully employed and having a decent life that's all there is.” SPP3 supported attending a higher education program in order to secure a “certificate where you can go and [...] get a higher skill job,” as long as the end goal was to be employed. This differs somewhat from additional literature, which suggests that safety is by far the greatest concern when considering sending students with disabilities to college (Griffin et al., 2010). Safety did rank in the middle ground within this study, with 15, or 46.9%, of participants ranking it as very important. Alternatively, physical health ranked very low with 11 participants, or 34.4%, ranking it as not at all important. The safety and physical health factors seemed to be more important to the individuals who participated in the support personnel focus group. SPP2 stated that “really good people get into really bad situations.” SPP3 went on to note that “there's no supervision. Teachers go home at the end of the day and there's no supervision in the dorm rooms.”

There are many factors that go into determining whether or not a continuing education program is suitable for a student with disabilities. Before those factors can be examined, however, the consideration of attending a program must first be placed on the table. The results to survey questions 12d and 13, which asked participants if they believed their students would be interested in attending a continuing education program and the primary goal of the student after completing high school respectively, offered no

statistical significance. However, the responses do show an insight into the participants' expectations for these students in regard to attending a continuing education program. Griffin et al. (2010) note that parents feel as though higher education would be a logical choice for their children, but they feel as though the educators do not support this decision. Teachers and support personnel were divided on this topic in the survey, with 50.0% stating the students would be interested in attending a PSE program, 15.6% indicating maybe, and 34.4% stating no, their students would not like to attend a PSE program.

With 50.0% of the participants indicating that their students would like to attend some form of higher education, one would expect the primary goal of the students' programs to focus on preparing them to enter into higher education. However, based on the data collected, the majority of participants, 24, or 75.0%, selected some form of employment as the primary goal for their students. Continuing education as the primary goal was selected by only four participants, or 12.5%. According to the research, few students with disabilities pursue some form of post-secondary education. Students with ID comprise the lowest percentages in this group with only 11% going on to attend a two-year or four-year college after completing high school (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011b). TP3 had a theory that explained why there was a gap between the interest in PSE and the development of goals for PSE.

If you would poll regular ed. [...] I think we have those similar statistics, where many of them would like to maybe go on to some type of higher education. [...] I'm sure probably one of the number one things would be cost, or I'm going to get

a job first to save the money to go to college, or I feel like transportation may be a huge issue.

These factors may be contributing components to why more students with disabilities do not attend higher education programs, however, the question still emerges; if so many educators believed their students would like to attend a continuing education program, why is this not the students' primary goal?

According to the literature, the number of college programs for students with disabilities has undoubtedly increased in the last eight years (Grigal, Hart, & Lewis, 2012a). According to data in this study, when asked if they were aware of an inclusive continuing education program that their students could attend, 12 teachers and 12 support personnel, or 75% of the total participants, said yes, they were aware of a program. Based on survey data collected on family perspectives on PSE, parents feel they are more open toward continuing education for their children with disabilities and that the educators could do much more to offer information and support for this transition option (Griffin et al., 2010). The data presented in the findings portion of this chapter shows that teachers and support personnel were open to the idea of students with disabilities attending some form of higher education, as long as there was a focus on vocational skills and the result was having the student successfully employed. However, the problem that persists is that continuing education programs are not being considered by the transition planning team as viable PSE options for students with disabilities. Chapter five will explore possible recommendations to this previously identified problem.

Summary

This study set out to measure the perspectives and perceptions that teachers and support personnel had regarding how well the transition planning process prepared high school students with Intellectual Disabilities for life after secondary education and how they viewed continuing education for these students. The statistical analysis indicated that results of three survey questions were statistically significant in providing answers to research questions (1) and (2). Further, focus groups provided data, which supplemented these three questions and provided insight into two additional areas from the original survey.

While improving the transition process and promoting post-secondary education for students with ID is an increasing area of interest in special education, much work still remains to strengthen the level of information and awareness in both of these areas. In an open-ended response question, one participant highlighted the importance of open communication and the sharing of information with the entire IEP team stating that “a list of options and contacts to give to parents and students in regards to post-secondary options... [and] services or programs offered as an adult” should be provided. These topics require further research to identify the communication process between the school district and the home. Recommendations and possible future areas of study will be explored in chapter five regarding both of these exposed problems.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

New studies, research, and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, have brought about a shift in attention on post-secondary education programs for students with disabilities. It was the belief of this researcher that further contributions could be made to this field of study with additional research into the perspectives of teachers and support personnel regarding continuing education and transition planning practices. This mixed methods study set out to collect data on these perspectives within a setting of six different school districts located in the area of South Central Pennsylvania. Research was conducted in order to gain a much needed insight into the perceived process of secondary transition planning and how higher education opportunities are explored within the high school educational careers of students with disabilities. In addition, the themes of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team support and transition planning issues were explored as part of this mixed methods study to support the original conceptual framework design, see Figure 6.

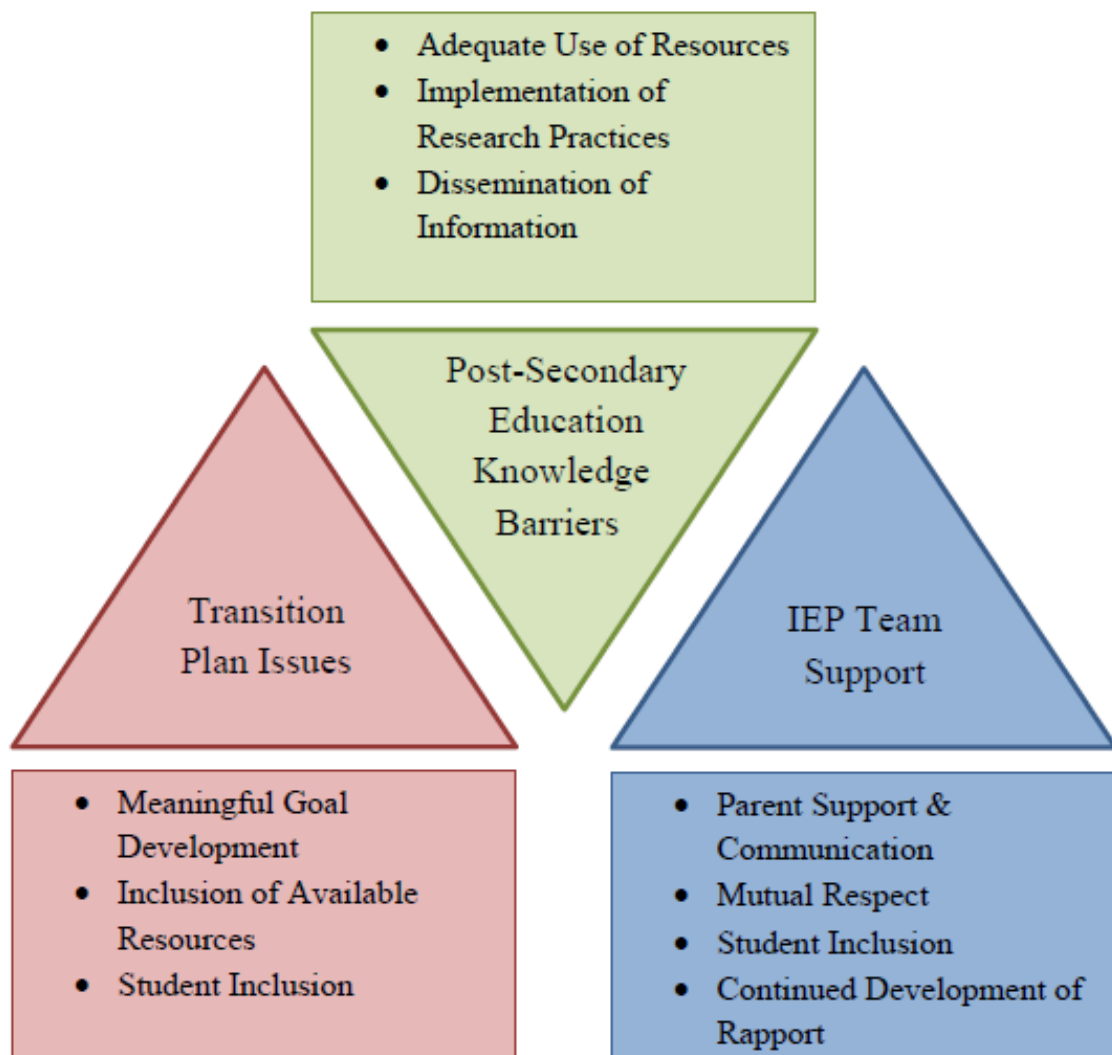


Figure 6. Concept map. This figure illustrates the researcher's conceptual framework.

Research Design

This study followed the explanatory sequential design, and collected quantitative data through the use of a survey tool and qualitative data through the use of focus groups. More specifically, the cross-sectional survey design was used in this study to collect quantitative data and the grounded theory design was used to collect qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). The support offered by mixed methods research and, more specifically,

the explanatory sequential design provided a better analysis of this study's specific research problem. Questions (1) and (2) both lent themselves to quantitative analysis through surveys with follow-up qualitative focus groups.

The post-positivism approach was used to keep biases in check, by acknowledging their existence and putting measures in place to control their influences on the research. Further, this research was rooted in disability theory. According to Creswell (2013), disability theory "addresses the meaning of inclusion in schools and encompasses administrators, teachers, and parents who have children with disabilities" (p. 33). The foundation of the research problem, transition planning and continuing education for students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID); and the participants used, teachers and support personnel; very clearly fit within the nature of disability theory.

Site and Population

One population group was included in this study. This group included the special education teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators of high school students with ID from six local school districts within South Central Pennsylvania. Total population sampling was used and invitations were sent out to 80 school district personnel from six separate school districts. Email invitations were sent out to the school district personnel population to introduce the study and issue consent for participation. The sample size attained for the quantitative portion of this study was 32 participants. This resulted in a confidence interval of 13.5, with a confidence level of 95%. The results of this study cannot be considered statistically sound; however, they do provide information for the school districts involved. The

sample size attained for the qualitative portion of this study was six participants. There were three participants in each of the two focus groups, teachers and support personnel.

Research Methods

There were two phases of data collection within this study. The first phase included the collection of quantitative survey data. The second phase for this study was qualitative focus groups. The timeline for the study was six months. The data collected from the survey took place first; it was opened on March 14, 2016, and was concluded on April 24, 2016. Analysis of survey data followed during the months of April, May, and June. Focus groups and artifact collection took place at the end of July. Findings and results were then written during the month of August.

A prepared and tested survey tool entitled *Florida College Collaborative Survey: Educator/Professional Version* was acquired from Nila Benito (2010) and was used by the researcher to collect demographic information and data for question (2). Two additional prepared and tested survey tools entitled *School Characteristic Survey* and *School Program Survey* were acquired from NLTS2 (2001) and were used by the researcher to collect data for question (1). The questions from these three survey tools were combined to develop the survey, which was used for data collection in this study. Although the questions from these surveys had never been used in isolation before, there was evidence to support why they were used in the study. These surveys had been tested in previous research studies and the findings had since been published in various academic journals. It was the belief of the researcher that the merging of specific transition and continuing education related questions from the three separate tools into

one new survey tool would produce relevant and statistically significant findings regarding the research questions.

An online survey tool, Qualtrics, was used to collect and record the data. This system allowed all survey results to be automatically uploaded to SPSS for analysis (Creswell, 2012). All survey data was stored on a password protected, encrypted drive on the researcher's computer. All participant information was kept confidential. Survey results were catalogued using numerical identifiers to help protect the participants' identities from being revealed based on any information that was given on the survey such as school district names (Creswell, 2012). In addition, each participant had the option of being included in a random drawing for one of ten \$20 gift cards as an incentive to participate in the survey.

A focus group tool was made from the 25-question survey tool that was used for the quantitative data collection portion of this study. Two focus groups were used to collect data to help strengthen and support the answers for research questions (1) and (2) based on the survey data that was collected. The specific questions used on the focus group tool were derived from the analysis of the quantitative survey data; three questions deemed as statistically significant were included in the focus groups, in addition, two questions that did not come back as statistically significant were also included to gain a more robust sample of the participants' insights. The reason behind this selection method was to follow the true nature of the explanatory sequential design, which is to collect qualitative data that explains or elaborates on the previously collected quantitative data (Creswell, 2012).

The focus group sessions were audio recorded by the researcher. The audio recordings were then transcribed to aid in the data analysis. Numerical identifiers were included in the transcription to ensure that participants remained unequivocally anonymous. In addition, notes were taken by the researcher to provide accurate interpretation of the comments made during the data collection (Creswell, 2012). The locations and times of the focus groups were scheduled at the convenience of the participants.

Findings and Results

Survey data was prepared, scored, and entered into SPSS for analysis to take place. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data to lay the foundation for the inferential statistical analyses stage. Analysis using a comparison of means and ANOVA tests were then performed on the data regarding the survey question results. The analysis from these tests aided the researcher in answering research questions (1) and (2).

Further, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the reliability and validity of the survey tool. The reliability coefficient for the survey tool was .346; this is smaller than the desired coefficient value of .70, or greater. However, since the items on this survey tool had been used in previous studies, their inclusion and clustering on the tool for this study was reasonable.

The focus group data was analyzed through thematic analysis by using open and axial coding, as supported by the grounded theory framework. First, the data was organized and transcribed (Creswell, 2012). Open coding and computer analysis was then conducted on the data in order to assign coding categories for themes that emerged

from the data (Merriam, 2009). This was followed by axial coding which selected one open coding category and related others to it (Merriam, 2009). These relationships were portrayed on coding paradigms, which can be found in chapter four. Once these relationships were identified, they were used to determine an overall theory of the perceptions that teachers and support personnel had regarding higher education for students with disabilities and the transition process, through selective coding (Merriam, 2009). These theories were used to supplement the data that was collected through the surveys.

This study set out to measure the perspectives and perceptions that teachers and support personnel had regarding how well the transition planning process prepared high school students with ID for life after secondary education and how they viewed continuing education for these students. The level of significance for this research study was set at $p \leq .05$, where the p level indicates the probability that the results are statistically significant (Ravid, 2011). The independent variables in this study were the teachers and support personnel. The dependent variables were the perspectives and perceptions. The statistical results attained from the comparison of means and ANOVA tests and the focus group data help to answer research question (1):

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?

The quantitative analysis and focus group data also provided answers concerning research question (2):

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Ethical Considerations

The researcher had participated in qualitative and quantitative research courses while pursuing the degree of Doctor of Education through Drexel University's Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management program. Further, the researcher had successfully completed training through CITI for Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research – RCR and Social, Behavioral and Educational Research Investigators. In order to document the precautions and considerations taken with the population for this study, IRB approval was obtained. A detailed overview and explanation of the research was provided to all participants. The researcher conducted data collection with minimal disturbance so as not to create disorder for the participants. The names of the sites used in the data collection were coded to provide anonymity for the school.

Summation

The researcher saw the importance in identifying and gathering information on the current knowledge base, from the perspectives of both teachers and support personnel, in order to resolve the problem of limited knowledge and information regarding the transition planning process and continuing education programs for students with ID. The data collected helped to answer the research questions developed for this study. Now that the participant's perceptions on transition planning and continuing education are isolated, resources and information can be disseminated to the researcher's

local area to aid IEP teams in appropriate transition planning which includes the consideration of continuing education for students with ID.

Conclusions

Research Questions

To evaluate the expectations of post-secondary life, the perceptions of continuing education, and the effectiveness of the secondary special education transition planning process for students with Intellectual Disabilities, a mixed methods study was conducted utilizing surveys and focus groups. Two questions were developed for this research:

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?
2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Research Question One

Regarding research question (1):

1. What are the perspectives of teachers and support personnel on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID?

Survey and focus group data were collected to provide an answer to this research question. The data indicated that participants agreed that the transition process to adult life had already begun by the time the students reached high school. Further, the majority of participants noted that their students attended transition meetings, but many

participants believed their students lacked the motivation needed to design their own transition plans and take on a leadership role in the meetings. Overall, the participants believed the instruction and information they were providing to their students and their families were adequate to prepare the student for adult life. However, all participants in the focus groups agreed that the students and families do not understand or retain this information, making it less beneficial. This information is supported by the research of Martinez, Conroy, and Cerreto (2012), which indicated that parents were often overwhelmed and confused by the transition process. This is discussed further in the *Transition Planning: Parent* section of the literature review.

The majority of participants believed that the primary transition goal on which they should focus in high school is securing some form of employment. However, progress on vocational goals did not rank the highest among participants. Rather, they believed their students were making the most progress on independent living and self-advocacy goals. Focus group participants were very concerned with their students being independent and taking charge of their own lives. In addition, they wanted to see students fully prepared to enter adult life. This included the reevaluation of the transition curriculum used in the programs and the IEP goals being written with vocational and life expectations in mind, rather than a purely academic focus.

Finally, participants largely believed their students would be prepared for life after high school; however, they were less confident as to whether there was a specific plan in place for the time immediately after high school. Additionally, the participants believed that information regarding post high school services were provided, but again they were concerned whether the students and their families not only understood the

information, but whether they fully realized how much of a shift there was between services provided in public education versus services provided after the student graduates. Again, the research presented in the *Transition Planning: Parent* section of the literature review supports this claim. Specifically, research by Hetherington, et al. (2010) indicated that parents did not possess a clear knowledge of the transition process or what their role should be in the planning of their child's transition from high school to post-secondary life.

Research Question Two

Regarding research question (2):

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and support personnel regarding students with disabilities enrolling in post-secondary education or training programs designed for students with ID?

Survey and focus group data were collected in order to provide an answer to the research question. The data indicated that participants had mixed feelings regarding whether or not their students would like to enroll in a continuing education program. Many participants in the focus groups believed that this interest lay solely with the parents being the driving force in their child's transition plan. The *Transition Planning: Parent* section of the literature review referred directly to the parent's level of involvement being a determinant in the student's future (Martinez et al., 2012). These participants agreed that a parent pushing their child toward higher education would result only in frustration for the family and an overwhelming economic burden that would not help the student secure employment that is more meaningful in the end.

While many participants believed that their students would like to go onto continuing education, they did not believe that this should be the student's primary transition goal. Participants were largely in favor of students being gainfully employed by the completion of high school. They believed that continuing education could be a consideration, but only if it provided additional vocational training that would help the student secure a higher level of employment than they could achieve with only a high school diploma.

Participants in the support personnel focus group believed very strongly that colleges were taking advantage of students with disabilities and their families by creating these programs that provide a "college experience" and marketing it toward those families who have struggled with accepting their child's disability. They believed the expense of the program negatively outweighed any type of academic or vocational advancement the student might receive from participating. However, the teacher focus group looked at continuing education as any type of training that occurred after high school, and saw the benefit that additional training in a specific skill set could offer a student with disabilities in the workforce.

Finally, for those students who did choose to pursue some form of higher education, the participants believed the cost of the program and transportation were the most important factors to consider. Conversely, physical health of the student was the lowest ranked factor for educators. This differed somewhat from the support personnel focus group, which was very concerned with the level of supervision provided at the higher education schools and programs.

Assumptions

Many individuals assume that students with special needs cannot attend some form of higher education (Briel, 2014). It was the belief of this researcher that the participants in this study would feel this way as well. However, the data indicated that 50.0% of the participants believed that continuing education could be a viable choice for students with disabilities to attend. Further, the focus group participants were also open to the idea of PSE, as long as the final outcome resulted in meaningful employment.

An assumption was generated that post-secondary education programs for students with disabilities do not exist because of a lack of information made available to school districts. The results from both the survey and the focus group data indicated that many participants were aware of PSE programs for students with disabilities. However, 29.4% of survey participants stated they were unaware or unsure if these programs were available.

Despite the creation of post-secondary education programs for individuals with disabilities, there is an assumption that a lack of self-motivation exists within the students themselves (Wilson et al., 2012). The data indicated that the participants believed the students lacked the motivation or ability to take a leadership role in the transition planning process.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the size of the population. A pool of 80 participants was used in this study. It was believed that this limitation would not have a negative impact on the findings or conclusions. While the data could be analyzed and the research questions answered, the sample size obtained in this study was very small and

the results did not offer a high level of reliability. Acquiring participants for a survey was a known obstacle. The use of a gift card drawing was an incentive the researcher believed would increase the rate of completion. While this incentive may have increased the participation, it was not able to produce the desired sample size of 66 participants. Increasing the population pool by including more school districts, could have improved the robustness of the study, but it is uncertain whether the higher population could have produced a stronger sample size.

Another limitation of this study was a misunderstanding of what continuing education is for students with disabilities. The literature suggested that higher education programs for students with ID were designed to offer training and enrichment in either a social skills and independent living focus, or a career development and vocational focus. It was undetermined whether the participants understood the full range of PSE programs for students with disabilities, particularly the support personnel focus group that took the term higher education to refer only to college. The researcher believed that this limitation would not prevent a study from being conducted that validly answered the research questions and solved the research problem appropriately and relevantly. It is the belief of this researcher that this limitation did not impose any restriction on the study's findings, results, interpretations, or conclusions.

Delimitations

This study took place with a small population of teachers, administrators, psychologists, counselors, related service personnel, and transition coordinators of high school students with ID. The study was limited to six school districts within the South Central Pennsylvania region. This study did not include educators of students with

disabilities other than ID. In addition, the perspectives of graduated students with ID and parents of students with ID, were not measured in this study. Reflecting upon the site, population, and methods chosen for this study; it is the belief of this researcher that alterations could be made to increase the validity and reliability of the results. A driving force behind this research study was to aid the school districts in understanding the procedures of the transition planning process, and the resources and options available to students with disabilities after they leave high school. A 21.25% participation rate was achieved for the teacher group and an 18.75% participation rate was achieved for the support personnel group in the quantitative portion of this study.

Another delimitation of this study was the exclusion of the transition-planning component of independent living. While post-secondary living arrangements are an important element of developing a thorough and complete transition plan, the goal of this study was to examine continuing education. There is no evidence that the exclusion of this component affected the data obtained in this study.

Recommendations

The problem in this study was that school district personnel are not adequately preparing students with ID for effective transitions to continuing education programs, due to an ineffective and disconnected transition planning process. The process does not provide school district personnel with adequate knowledge and information about how to meet transitional and educational needs of students with ID. In result, often students with ID are discouraged from exploring continuing education due to a lack of knowledge regarding the programs available (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). This research set out to study the perspectives of selected educational personnel to determine why this problem

existed and whether the teachers and support personnel believed they had adequate knowledge and information concerning the transition planning process and continuing education for students with ID.

Transition Planning

The IEP team is comprised of both educators and family members (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). Their objective is to assess the students' abilities and formulate a plan that will benefit the students in school and prepare them for a successful life after graduation. Part of a well-developed high school IEP is the inclusion of a transition plan. Transition is the process for students with disabilities to prepare them for adult life (PaTTAN, n.d.). In Pennsylvania this begins at 14 years of age when a plan that includes employment, post-secondary education, and independent living goals is developed to meet the needs of the student as he or she moves from a secondary education placement to inclusion within society (PaTTAN, n.d.).

This researcher believed that the participant's perspectives on the secondary transition practices and process to post-secondary life for students in high school with ID would align with the current literature available. A review of the data shows that the participants believed they were providing vast and varied educational experiences and information to their students and their families, with 79.4% of participants believing the education provided to the students would prepare them for life after high school. However, this data is contradicted with the staggering 55.9% of participants who indicated that either their students did not have an IEP that included an individualized plan for the time immediately after graduation, or were unsure if such plans existed. The

problem, therefore, is not in the types of services and information provided, but in the method in which it is disseminated.

It is the belief of this researcher that there are three recommendations to help solve this newly identified problem. These solutions include: 1) early IEP training sessions, 2) informal IEP team member meet and greet sessions, and 3) a district wide resource portal.

Concerning solution (1), early IEP training sessions; the results in this study indicate that the participants believed that the students and parents were not informed on the transition planning process, the IEP in general, and the opportunities available to students with disabilities. Regular IEP training sessions should be offered by the district to bring more knowledge and understanding to this group. These sessions should be started when the student is first identified as needing an IEP and should provide a detailed explanation of what each section of the IEP means. When the student reaches transition age, additional training sessions should be offered to explain the components of the transition plan and how it prepares the student for life after high school. The students, themselves, should also be included in these training sessions so they can be made aware of the process and begin to take a leadership role in their transition plans. Providing IEP and transition plan training sessions to parents and students does not ensure that they will attend. However, if these trainings are offered, the district would be more assured that it has done everything in its power to help educate the parents of students with disabilities so they can fully understand the purpose of the IEP, and future meetings can be collaborative and productive.

Concerning solution (2), informal IEP team member meet and greet sessions; the data indicates that some of the participants were not fully aware of who attended their students' transition planning meetings and that parents often do not have the time or desire to attend formal meetings. In order to bring more awareness regarding the meeting process and who should be participating, it is recommended that informal meetings be held where parents and students can come into the school and meet the different IEP team members. Parents may only interact with their child's IEP case manager and may not be aware that the IEP team is comprised of many individuals such as regular education teachers, counselors, psychologists, administrators, outside agency representatives, etc. If informal gatherings are held where parents and students could meet these individuals and learn about their different roles, they might better understand the transition planning and IEP processes.

Concerning solution (3), a district wide resource portal; the findings in this study indicate that the participants believed instruction in transition planning was being provided to the students. However, the data also suggested that the students' progress on goals for how they want to leave high school were drastically low, and many participants believed the transition goals were not preparing the students for life after high school. The creation of an online resource portal, where all IEP and transition related material is stored, could help the families of students with disabilities access the information the district provides when they need it. This portal also has potential to help those educators who may not be aware of all the resources and information regarding transition planning and life after high school for students with disabilities. In addition to the everyday tools

and resources available on the portal, an interactive component where users could post and share questions, information, and resources could also be established.

Continuing Education

A shift in thinking among family members, along with the reauthorization of HEOA has resulted in a higher demand for continuing education programs to be developed for students with ID to participate in after high school. This researcher believed there was a lack of knowledge regarding these programs for families and educators, and that this has contributed to an atmosphere of frustration for individuals who want to see their students have rewarding and productive lives after high school (Martinez, et al., 2012).

Based on survey data collected on family perspectives on PSE, parents feel they are more open toward continuing education for their children with disabilities and that the staff could do much more to offer information and support for this transition option (Griffin et al., 2010). The data presented in chapter four supports this claim. Only half of the participants, 50.0%, were open to the idea of students with disabilities attending some form of higher education. The problem that persists is the fact that many educators remain unaware of the options and programs available to their students.

This researcher will present three recommendations to help solve this previously identified problem. These solutions include: 1) post-secondary education information sessions, 2) a continuing education reference guide, and 3) a previously discussed district wide resource portal.

Concerning solution (1), post-secondary education information sessions; the results of this study indicate that participants were not fully aware of the available

continuing education and training programs that are available to students with ID.

Information sessions should be offered by the district to both educators and families of students with disabilities to bring more knowledge and awareness of these programs.

These sessions should be led either by a district employee who is knowledgeable on the programs or by representatives from the programs themselves. The latter option is highly recommended as parents and educators will be given the opportunity to interact directly with the expert and gain a deeper understanding of the program. Further, the information should be offered through face-to-face seminars which can be live streamed for participants who are seeking the information, but cannot physically attend the session.

The live stream can also be recorded and archived on a resource portal for participants to review at their own convenience. Providing post-secondary education information sessions to parents and educators does not ensure that these individuals will attend or watch the seminars. However, by offering these sessions the district would be confident in their attempts to help bring awareness to the parents and educators of students with disabilities so they can fully understand the opportunities available after high school.

Concerning solution (2), a continuing education reference guide; the data indicated that many participants were not aware that PSE programs for students with ID existed, nor did they feel like they had access to all of the available information. This researcher recommends that a compilation of the available, local continuing education and training programs be assembled. This reference guide could then be used to research the types of programs available to find one that is a good fit for a particular student. This guide could also be made available on a district wide resource portal so both educators and parents have access to the information.

Concerning solution (3), a district wide resource portal; the findings in this study indicated that participants believed that continuing education could be a viable choice for students with disabilities; however, the participants were not fully aware of whether or not these programs existed. The creation of an online resource portal, where a continuing education reference guide, archived seminars, and other PSE information is stored, can help the parent population access information that was previously unknown. This portal also has the potential to help those educators who may not be aware of all the available resources and information regarding continuing education and PSE programs. While a district wide resource portal has the ability to gather and consolidate information in one place, its implementation and use by educators and parents cannot be guaranteed. In order to promote and increase the use of the portal, and to create a collaborative community, the district could implement a live social media aspect on the portal where students, families, and educators can post and share questions, information, and resources. This could provide a tier one intervention in bridging the gaps of knowledge barriers and could also strengthen the relationships between all stakeholders.

In addition, after the online resource portal is established by the district, it should be presented to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). PDE is a state government agency that puts forth laws and guidelines for educating students in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], n.d.). If PDE were to adopt a continuing education resource portal; educators and families across the state could have access to the information, awareness of these programs could grow, and more students with disabilities could explore the possibility of attending a post-secondary education program.

Personal Theory and Future Research

There were many biases and opinions this researcher had prior to beginning research for this study. Many of these aligned with the assumptions developed for this research. After conducting a thorough review of the available literature, this researcher now understands that continuing education programs for students with disabilities do exist and can be a viable option for students with ID.

This researcher, like many educators, believed continuing education for students with disabilities meant the student would be sitting in a lecture hall, auditing courses that would not help him make any advancements in life. However, the literature revealed that higher education for students with disabilities focuses on isolating the student's needs and developing a program to support, educate, and guide the student toward taking a productive place in society. Further, the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study showed the researcher that while many educators do share this former mindset, some are starting to see the benefits of enrolling a student in a continuing education program.

A theory, developed by the researcher, began to emerge from this study that could help shift the perception of continuing education for students with disabilities. Teachers need to educate themselves on the post-secondary options available on a nationwide level in order to develop a substantial knowledge base concerning higher education for students with disabilities. After these individuals develop an understanding of the benefits of continuing education, they can petition their district supervisors and administrators to start disseminating information to the families to further increase awareness. Finally, after school districts start receiving requests for information, they

can partner with local higher education institutions and agencies to help develop programs that will benefit students with disabilities, provide them with age appropriate educational experiences, and target specific skill sets that will increase their level of independence in society.

The development of this theory has opened the door to three areas of future research. First, research should be conducted to determine what individuals believe higher education is, in order to better understand why continuing education is so often encouraged for regular education students and discouraged for students with disabilities. Second, further data should be collected concerning the perceptions and perspectives of parents on the transition planning process and continuing education for students with disabilities. Third, research should be conducted to illicit the expectations that school districts and higher education programs have for one another. This would have the potential to help develop better transitions, not only for students with disabilities, but for regular education students as well; along with providing an introduction between the two facilities in order to promote the development of possible hybrid programs.

Summary

Due to new studies, research, and the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act, post-secondary education has now become a viable option for students with disabilities. While more of these programs are developed every year, the awareness of them has yet to become common knowledge within the secondary educational setting where transition planning for students with disabilities takes place. This study was significant to the areas of special education and higher education because it offered new data from teachers and support personnel of high school students with Intellectual

Disabilities. By obtaining data concerning the perceptions and opinions of these individuals, the knowledge and resources derived from this research can allow IEP teams to make informed decisions on life after high school for their students with disabilities, including the consideration of continuing education.

As the data were reviewed, it proved that the awareness of the programs and the understanding of the transition planning process had yet to become common knowledge among all of the participants, and even more so for the students and their families. This issue led to the development of six recommendations for future practice within school districts to help educators disseminate information and to help parents receive information on the secondary transition process and post-secondary options available to the students, their families, and educators.

The conceptual framework of this study has always revolved around addressing issues that will improve the educational experience of the student. Through the acknowledgement that PSE barriers, transition plan issues, and IEP team support issues exist; the recommendations outlined can be put in place to help unify the IEP team and strengthen the transition process for the benefit of the student. It was a desired outcome that this study would add to the continually growing body of knowledge that is continuing education for students with disabilities and the transition planning process. With this newly gained information, educators and parents may be better equipped to develop transition plans that will meet the needs of the students and consider options that were previously unknown or out of reach.

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Appendix A: Survey Tool

Demographic Questions		
1.	Multiple Choice	Relationship to students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational Staff • Support Coordinator • Educator • Special Education Supervisor • Related Service Provider (please specify) • Other (please specify):
2.	Multiple Choice	Please share the school district where you work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big Spring • Carlisle • Cumberland Valley • Mechanicsburg • Northern York • Shippensburg
3.	Multiple Choice	Which of the following disabilities identifies the majority of the students that you serve? Please check all that apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual Disability (Mental Retardation) • Down syndrome • Cerebral Palsy • Autism • Asperger Syndrome • Other (please specify):
4.	Multiple Choice	Please check all that describe the high school education of the students you serve. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some General Education Classes • Pull-out Special Classes • Fully inclusive • Special residential • Home-school • Work-based learning site • Community-based instruction • Other (please specify)

5.	Likert	How much do you think the students you serve like high school? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not at all • Somewhat • A lot
6.	Multiple Choice	How will the majority of your students earn their diplomas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of required traditional credits • Graduate based on IEP goals • Don't know

Transition Questions		
7.	Open Ended	At what age does this school begin developing Individualized Transition Plans for students with disabilities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended
8.	Dichotomous	Has there been planning for transition to adult life for your students? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
9.	Dichotomous	For students with disabilities, does this school offer instruction that specifically focuses on transition planning (e.g., a specialized curriculum designed to help students assess options and develop strategies for leaving secondary school and transitioning to adult life)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
10.	Dichotomous	Do your students now spend any part of the school day in a vocation education or applied academics class (e.g., career planning, prevocational, occupational skills, business, computer technology, industrial arts, some home economics classes)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
11.	Dichotomous	Do your students' transition plans or IEPs specifically state what course of study or kinds of classes the students should pursue in order to meet their post-school transition goals? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No
12.	Likert	After High School. Please answer these questions based on your understanding of the majority of the students you serve. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the education of the students you serve prepared them

		<p>for life after high school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the students you serve have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for the time immediately after your students receive their high school diploma? • Has school staff encouraged the students you serve to continue learning after your students receive their high school diplomas? • Do you think the students you serve would like to enroll in a continuing education program after receiving their high school diploma? • Do you think the students you serve and their families understand the educational opportunities that are available after high school? • Do you know of an inclusive continuing education program that students you serve can attend after receiving their high school diploma?
13.	Multiple Choice	<p>The primary goal for students in your program is to prepare them to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get competitive employment (includes military) • Get into sheltered employment • Get supported employment • Attend a continuing education program • Attend a postsecondary vocational training program • Live independently • Maximize functional independence • Enhance social/interpersonal relationships and satisfaction • Other • Don't know
14.	Likert	<p>How much progress do you believe your students are making toward each kind of goal for the transition to adulthood?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals for how he/she wants to leave secondary school • Vocationally oriented goals • Goals for continuing education • Independent living goals • Behavior management goals • Social/interpersonal goals • Self-advocacy

15.	Likert	<p>How well suited do you believe your students' school program is for preparing them to achieve their transition goals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not at all well suited • Somewhat well suited • Fairly well suited • Very well suited
16.	Multiple Choice	<p>Who has actively participated in your students' transition planning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General education academic subject teachers • General education vocational teachers or work study coordinator • Special education teachers • School administrators • School counselors or psychologists • Related service personnel • Parents/guardians • Student • Vocational Rehabilitation Agency counselor • Staff of the Social Security Administration • Staff of other outside agencies, please specify • Employer • Representative of continuing education program • Advocate • Other • Don't know
17.	Multiple Choice	<p>Which of the following best describes this students' role in their transition planning?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This student has not attended planning meetings or participated in the transition planning process • This student has been present in discussions of transition planning, but participated very little or not at all • This student has provided some input into transition planning as a moderately active participant • This student has taken a leadership role in the transition planning process, helping set the direction of discussions, goals, and programs or service needs identified • I don't know

18.	Multiple Choice	<p>Has any of the following been contacted by the school or school system regarding programs or employment for your students after they receive their high school diplomas? Please check all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postsecondary vocational schools • State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency • Other vocational training programs • Continuing education programs • U.S. military • Potential employers • Job placement programs or agencies • Supported employment programs • Sheltered workshops • Mental health agencies • Social Security Administration • Supervised residential support agencies • Adult day programs • Other social service agencies • Congregate care facilities or institutions • Other, please explain
19.	Multiple Choice	<p>Has information about services available after high school related to your students' kind of disabilities been provided to his or her parents/guardians by the school system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Not yet • No • Don't know
20.	Multiple Choice	<p>What service or program needs might your students require the time period after concluding their public education career?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiology • Behavioral intervention • Mental health services • Mobility training • Nursing or other medical services • Occupational therapy • Physical therapy • Social work services • Speech or communication therapy or services

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational accommodations to help pursue continuing education • Supported living arrangement • Transportation assistance • Vision services • Vocational training, placement, or support • Other • None of these • Don't know
21.	Multiple Choice	<p>To the best of your knowledge, which of the following are available in this community or nearby for students who have received their high school diploma (e.g., within 20 miles)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postsecondary vocational school • Alternative or continuation school, such as a school for potential dropouts or for dropouts to earn a GED • Vocational technical school for secondary school students • Continuing education program • Independent living center for persons with disabilities • Work facilities for adults with disabilities, such as sheltered workshop or a work activity center • Group home or halfway house for adults with disabilities • Publicly-supported job training programs • City bus service or other generally available public transportation • Special accommodations for those with physical disabilities on public transportation • Advocacy groups for persons with disabilities • Support groups or social groups for persons with disabilities or their families
22.	Open Ended	<p>Is there anything else you would like to share about your hopes for the lives of the students you serve after high school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended

Continuing Education Questions

23.	Likert	<p>Do you think the students you serve would be interested in enrolling in a continuing education program after receiving their high school diplomas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Maybe • No
24.	Likert	<p>Please indicate the importance of the factors below when determining whether attending a continuing education program, after receiving a high school diploma, would meet the needs of the majority of the students you serve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Curriculum Supports • Behavior Supports • Physical health • Safety • Transportation • Certificate or degree • Social opportunities, connections, & friendships • Housing options • Employment during or after completion • Closeness to their home
25.	Open Ended	<p>What are 3 of the most important things that would be needed if you could design a continuing education program for the students you serve to participate in after receiving their high school diploma?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-ended

Appendix B: Educator Email Invitation

Dear Educator,

I am a Doctor of Education candidate completing a degree in Educational Leadership and Management through Drexel University. During the winter and spring quarters of the 2015-2016 school year, I will be collecting data for my study entitled *Transition Planning and Continuing Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*. The purpose of this study is to measure the perspectives, perceptions, and expectations that administrators, educators, and parents have regarding transition planning and continuing education for high school students with ID.

Your district superintendent has granted me permission to conduct this research within your high school. In addition to the participation of your district, five other area school districts within the consortium have agreed to participate. Special education administrators, teachers, counselors, psychologists, and parents of high school students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) from all six school districts will form the population for this study. You are receiving this email because you are a special education administrator, teacher, counselor, or psychologist in a school district chosen for this quantitative research study.

Participation is voluntary and may be terminated by the participant at any time. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey consisting of 25 questions which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. At the conclusion of the survey your participation in the study is complete.

Participants have the option of being included in a drawing for one of ten \$20 gift cards to a major chain retailer (Wal-Mart or Target) as an incentive to participate in the survey.

I have attached a consent form that includes detailed information about the purpose and scope of the study, participant expectations, and procedures. Please read through the attachment carefully and contact me at ser87@drexel.edu with any questions you may have.

If you agree to participate in the study, please click on the link below which will take you to the electronic survey. You will be asked to digitally sign and date the consent form before you begin the survey. You will be able to print a copy of the completed consent form for your records.

<http://tinyurl.com/zh75dqv>

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sarah E. Roller

Drexel University Doctoral Candidate

In the event the link above does not work, please use the full web address of the survey:

https://drexel.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_aV7Ehfm0dDUlfc9

Appendix C: Survey - Letter of Informed Consent and Invitation to Participate

Drexel University

Consent to Take Part In a Research Study

1. Title of research study:

Transition Planning and Continuing Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

2. Researcher:

Lori Severino, Ed.D, Principal Investigator

Sarah E. Roller, Research Investigator

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study

We invite you to take part in a research study because you are an administrator, educator, or parent of a high school student with an Intellectual Disability in the consortium of School Districts being used in **this study**.

4. What you should know about a research study

- This research study will be explained within this consent document.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part now and change your mind later.
- If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.
- Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. Who can you talk to about this research study?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at:

Sarah E. Roller

Doctoral Candidate, Drexel University

ser87@drexel.edu

or

Lori Severino, Ed.D

Doctoral Candidate's Committee Chair

las492@drexel.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects so that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans subjects taking part in the research. You may talk to them at (215) 762-3944 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- **You want to get information or provide input about this research.**

6. Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to measure educator and parent opinions toward transition planning and continuing education for high school students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID).

7. How long will the research last?

The research is expected to last nine months, we ask that you complete the survey once in that time frame. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey consisting of 25 questions which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

8. How many people will be studied?

We are inviting 300 people to be in this study.

9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey consisting of 25 questions which should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. You may only complete the survey one time. At the conclusion of the survey your participation in the study is complete.

Each participant will have the option of being included in a random drawing for one of ten \$20 gift cards to a major chain retailer (Wal-Mart or Target) as an incentive to participate in the survey.

10. What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, it is very important that you:

- Complete the online survey in its entirety during the specified time period of data collection
- Follow the investigator's or researcher's instructions.
- Notify the investigator or researcher right away if you have a complaint.

11. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

12. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

If you agree to take part in the research now, you can stop at any time it will not be held against you.

Any individual who terminates their participation in the survey will not be eligible for the gift card drawing.

13. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

No

14. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

15. Will being in this study help me in any way?

This study will offer no direct benefit to you.

16. What happens to the information we collect?

All surveys will be conducted anonymously and participants will be assigned a numerical identifier. Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information including research study records to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization. The data collected in this study, excluding any personal information, may also be released to any of the six school districts contained within the consortium at the superintendents' request. Request must be presented to the researcher in writing by formal letter that is signed and dated by the superintendent of the district making the request.

All data collected will be stored using the researcher's privately owned drive to ensure the data is secure, regularly backed-up, and encrypted. This drive will require log-in credentials known only to the researcher to keep the data protected. Hard copies of any data will be secured in key lock safe owned by the researcher. The researcher will be the only individual who has access to the key. The data will be kept for a period no less than three years, but not exceeding ten years, at which time all electronic data records will be deleted and paper records destroyed.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

17. What else do I need to know?

This research study is being done by Drexel University.

If you agree to take part in this research study, you may be entered in a drawing for one of ten \$20 gift cards to a major chain retailer (Wal-Mart or Target). In order to be entered in the drawing, participants will receive a statement at the end of the online survey explaining the drawing procedures. If you want to be enrolled in the drawing, you will click on the provided link, will be taken to a secondary site, and will be asked to provide your name, email address, and phone number. This secondary site will not be connected to the survey site in anyway and none of the information provided will be able to be linked back to the survey responses. The drawing for the gift cards will take place after all data has been collected, near the beginning of the third month of the study.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS →

5-31-2016

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Form Date

Appendix D: Focus Group Tool

1. For students with disabilities, discuss your school's instruction that specifically focuses on transition planning.
2. Discuss the time immediately after your students receive their high school diploma and whether or not they have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for this time.
3. Discuss whether the education of your students has prepared them for life after high school, and if you think your students and their families understand the educational opportunities that are available after high school.
4. Discuss the importance of the curriculum support factor in meeting the needs of a student who may be attending a continuing education program.
5. Discuss the primary transition goal for students in your program and whether you think they would like to enroll in a continuing education program.

Appendix E: Focus Group - Letter of Informed Consent and Invitation to Participate

Drexel University

Consent to Take Part In a Research Study

1. Title of research study:

Transition Planning and Continuing Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

2. Researcher:

Lori Severino, Ed.D, Principal Investigator

Sarah E. Roller, Research Investigator

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study

We invite you to take part in a research study because you are an administrator or educator of a high school student with an Intellectual Disability in the consortium of School Districts being used in this study.

4. What you should know about a research study

This research study will be explained within this consent document.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part.

You can agree to take part now and change your mind later.

If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.

Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. Who can you talk to about this research study?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at:

Sarah E. Roller

Doctoral Candidate, Drexel University

ser87@drexel.edu

or

Lori Severino, Ed.D

Doctoral Candidate's Committee Chair

las492@drexel.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB reviews research projects so that steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans subjects taking part in the research. You may talk to them at (215) 762-3944 or email HRPP@drexel.edu for any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

6. Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to measure educator opinions toward transition planning and continuing education for high school students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID).

7. How long will the research last?

The research is expected to last nine months, we ask that you participate in one focus group session during that time frame. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to meet with the researcher and other focus group participants for one session not exceeding two hours.

8. How many people will be studied?

We are inviting 32 people to be in the focus group portion of this study.

9. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to meet with the researcher and other focus group participants for one session not exceeding two hours. ***At the conclusion of the focus group session your participation in the study is complete.***

10. What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, it is very important that you:

Complete the focus group session in its entirety during the specified time and location of data collection

Follow the investigator's or researcher's instructions.

Notify the investigator or researcher right away if you have a complaint.

11. What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research and it will not be held against you.

12. What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

If you agree to take part in the research now, you can stop at any time it will not be held against you.

13. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

No

14. Do I have to pay for anything while I am on this study?

There is no cost to you for participating in this study.

15. Will being in this study help me in any way?

This study will offer no direct benefit to you.

16. What happens to the information we collect?

All focus group sessions will be conducted anonymously and participants will be assigned a numerical identifier or pseudonym. Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information including research study records to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this organization. The data collected in this study, excluding any personal information, may also be released to any of the six school districts contained within the consortium at the superintendents' request. Request must be presented to the researcher in writing by formal letter that is signed and dated by the superintendent of the district making the request.

All data collected will be stored using the researcher's privately owned drive to ensure the data is secure, regularly backed-up, and encrypted. This drive will require log-in credentials known only to the researcher to keep the data protected. Hard copies of any data will be secured in key lock safe owned by the researcher. The researcher will be the only individual who has access to the key. The data will be kept for a period of no less than three years, but not exceeding ten years, at which time all electronic data records will be deleted and paper records destroyed.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

17. What else do I need to know?

This research study is being done by Drexel University.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

DO NOT SIGN THIS FORM AFTER THIS →

8-31-2016

Signature of subject

Date

Printed name of subject

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Form Date

Appendix F: Transition Inventories and Assessments Used by Participants

1. Brigance Transition Skills Inventory
2. Drive of Your Life
3. Keys2Work
4. O-Net
5. PA Career Zone
6. Picture Interest Career Survey (PICS)
7. ResCare
8. RIASEC - The Holland Occupational Themes
9. Teacher Made Inventories

Appendix G: Teacher Made Transition Inventory by Sarah E. Roller

Student's Home Life Inventory	
Student Name:	
Person Who Completed Inventory:	
Date Completed:	
Directions: Read each sentence and decide how often your child performs each task independently. <p style="text-align: center;">Always (> 90%), Sometimes (90-10%), or Never (< 10%)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please use <u>A</u> - Always, <u>S</u> - Sometimes, <u>N</u> - Never, or <u>N/A</u> - Not Applicable</p>	
Frequency	Task
	1. Brushes teeth
	2. Picks out clothes
	3. Gets dressed
	4. Ties shoes
	5. Brushes hair
	6. Goes to the bathroom
	7. Takes shower/bath
	8. Washes hands
	9. Makes breakfast for self
	10. Makes lunch for self
	11. Makes dinner for self
	12. Uses the microwave
	13. Uses the oven
	14. Uses the stove top
	15. Uses the toaster
	16. Uses the dishwasher
	17. Turns on TV/Operates remote

	18. Turns on computer
	19. Uses computer (i.e. word, internet, etc.)
	20. Opens doors
	21. Closes doors
	22. Gets into vehicle/buckles seatbelt
	23. Turns on/off lights in rooms
	24. Folds clothes
	25. Washes laundry
	26. Dries laundry (dryer/hangs it outside)
	27. Washes dishes
	28. Dries dishes
	29. Puts dishes back where they belong
	30. Sets the table
	31. Clears the table
	32. Sweeps the floor
	33. Can locate toys/games
	34. Puts toys/games away
	35. Asks for help
	36. Asks for something she/he wants
	37. Completes homework
	38. Interacts with others
	39. Says "please/thank you"
	40. Understands other's emotions (i.e. knows when someone is upset)

